THE LUDIC CITY:

THINKING THROUGH GEOGRAPHIES OF ENCOUNTER

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis. This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

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SUMMARY

This thesis is interested in the ludic city, which it takes to be a clarion call for an urban world that enchants its inhabitants through playful encounter. Three questions are central to this thesis: How can we study the ludic city in order to make sense of its unfolding? What does the ludic city entail and what is the nature of its enchantments? What is the relationship between the ludic city and everyday living?

It seeks to extend engagement with the interface of play and enchantment by thinking through the geographies of encounter in urban space. I adopt an eight week ethnographic study of two types of neighbourhood play spaces – the open field and the street football court. I show how users create or dissolve boundaries, leverage friendships to maintain and manipulate these boundaries and the resultant possibilities for play and its enchantments in these spaces.

The empirical findings of this thesis allow an appreciation of the ludic city as a continually unfolding geosocial phenomenon and the variegated ways in which playful encounters enchant the mind, body and soul. It also demonstrates that the ludic city can feature both centrally or as an embellishment to the everyday lives of different urban inhabitants. Either way, this not only allows a fulfilling urban experience but aids the wider reproduction of society.

Keywords: Boundaries; Enchantment; Encounter; Friendship, Neighbourhood, Play, Urban Space

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The ludic city – what and why?

Urban space offers myriad possibilities for urban life. Inasmuch as it scripts and constrains the behaviour of urban inhabitants to what is deemed appropriate by urban planners and managers, it offers the potential for disorder, creativity, competition, spontaneity, risk, and change. These experiences can be a result of sustained, calculated practice or can take place in intense, random and fleeting ways (Latham 1999). It is through the actions of those who use urban space that its full potential for possibilities and experiences are unraveled (Stevens 2007).

Play is one such use of/ in urban space. Lefebvre notes that the "human being has the need to accumulate energies and to spend them, even waste them in play" (Lefebvre in Kofman and Lebas 1996: 147). Research on play dates back to the 1960s. It began with French sociologist Robert Caillois (1961) who analyzed adroitly the evolution of play in different cultures and continued with geographers such as John Bale (1993; 2003) who sought to study play from the perspective of space, place and identity. Such scholarship has been instrumental towards advancing the notion that play is a fundamentally important human need and expression, as well as questioning its relationship with space and society. These are seminal works in their own right; yet without serious consideration of play as a social phenomenon that can occur in micro and ordinary spaces, between ordinary people.

Play is an inherently social encounter. It takes its energies from the interactions between people who engage in playful activities with one another, and in turn presents unique and variegated experiences for them. The 1990s has seen a proliferation of research that has sought to explore how the full range of possibilities in urban space can be realized through interactional activities broadly conceived as 'play' (see Borden 2001; Dargan and Zeitlin

1990; Lennard and Lennard 1984; Franck and Stevens 2013; Stevens 2007). To this end, the ludic city represents a conceptual apparatus that seeks to extend engagement with the interface of playful encounters and enchanting experiences in urban space (Stevens 2007). Yet, is a term that has not caught on in academia. A search for the term 'ludic' in relation to space, the city or geography on Google Scholar brings up few interesting and insightful articles (see Woodyear 2012 for an exception).

Addressing this lacuna, this thesis takes interest in extending engagement with play and enchantment, as well as how this imbricates with everyday living. Particularly, it sees play as a social phenomenon, one that must be investigated in tandem with the geographies of encounter in urban space. Studying what the ludic city entails and its potential for enchantment has been an important goal for states and planners concerned with the liveability of the neighbourhoods and the happiness of their citizens (see Yuen 1995). This is not least because fulfilled citizens make (re)productive citizens. Through their playful endeavor urban inhabitants can enable a satisfying and wondrous urban experience; taking advantage of conditions under which labour may be transformed into play, fetishism into curiosity, exploitation into reciprocity, and repetition into spontaneity (Gilloch 1996). A world where inhabitants explore, manipulate and transgress the boundaries of their own mundane existence through playful action in urban space enables them to create their own unique experiences in the city. Such experiences, some argue, are an antidote to the alienating tendencies of everyday living. Yet, they can also be fundamental to the wider reproduction of society.

1.2 The neighbourhood in Singapore: a great place to play football?

This thesis focuses on recreational football in neighbourhood spaces. In Singapore, this can take place in two different arenas – open fields and street football courts. Open fields have

had a cult following in the city-state, especially in the 1980s – where people of different ages, sizes, races and ability convened on a daily basis to play the beautiful game. Street football courts are a ubiquitous fixture in public housing neighbourhoods in Singapore. Constructed en masse in the 1990s, these remain important arenas for recreational football and social activity, and are highly utilized by neighbourhood residents, especially on weekday evenings and weekends.

The climate of recreational football in Singapore has however been fast changing in the recent decade. As the city-state underwent a phase of frenzied public housing construction in the 1980s open fields for football have also been inevitably supplanted by construction projects. Those that remain are tightly policed and primed for future construction. To compound matters, the construction of various mega pay-per-play venues such as The Cage at Kallang and The Cage Sports Park @ Turf City has seen users of neighbourhood football spaces gravitate to these so that they can play with a controlled group of friends at their own convenience. The politics of co-existence in street football courts (which will be explored in chapter five) have also influenced a shift in its demographic of users – from a largely heterogeneous crowd to one that is relatively more homogenized according to different ethnic groups (Lai 2011). Despite these developments, there remains a significant proportion of the population (especially those who do not wish to or are unable to fork out a premium to play football) for whom open fields and street football courts remain important

Plate 1.1 A typical open field and street football court in Singapore

Plate 1.2 Pay-per-play football venues such as The Cage @ Turf City

Despite the importance of neighbourhood play spaces for the ordinary resident, there remains a lack of inquiry on the relations in these sites. Bunnell et al (2012) argue that the neglect of research in this area can be attributed to the tendency for the neighbourhood to be regarded as organically functioning unit. As such, research has largely focused on the neighbourhood as a spatial unit of analysis and concomitantly eschewed inquiry on the nature of everyday interactions between the very different groups of people who inhabit these units and the experiences that result from these interactions.

Neighbourhoods always take on a social aspect. They are perhaps much better defined as "a limited territory within a larger urban area where people inhabit dwellings and interact socially" (Hallman 1984 in Galster 2011: 2111) or "geographical units within which certain social relations exist" (Downs 1981 in Galster 2011: 2111). Up to this point, those who do focus on social relations in neighbourhoods tend to do so from a decidedly planning perspective. Such work evaluates the extent to which neighbourhood design encourages a particular set of idealized social relations (see for example Williams 2005). While urban design is important in determining the terms and experience of using neighbourhood space,

such research often conflates different groups of potential users into a homogenous community. This not only glosses over the variegated needs and wants of individuals and groups but the different agencies of different inhabitants to create their own solidarities and experiences in response to urban design. This thesis thus addresses the pressing need to look inwards into the neighbourhood by examining the social relations within neighbourhood footballing spaces.

1.3 Positioning this research

As an urban ideal, the ludic city is a clarion call for an urban world that enchants its inhabitants through playful encounter. The starting point of this thesis is to examine this interface between play and enchantment. Specifically, this thesis aims to make sense of the ludic city as it actually unfolds and comment on its imbrications with everyday urban living. To achieve this, it attempts to think the ludic city through its geographies of encounter. Because users leverage a space in creative ways to construct, maintain and manipulate multiple possibilities of play, the *social* aspects of everyday encounter in these spaces that are in part determined by but not limited to the form of the space need to be foregrounded if an understanding of how the ludic city unfolds is to be achieved.

This thesis therefore analyses the boundaries that are created by users of neighbourhood play spaces, the social relations – in particular notions and practices of friendship – that manipulate these boundaries, the resulting possibilities of play and their enchantments and how these imbricate with everyday living. In unravelling the nuances of this relationship, it draws its significance from answering three important questions.

- First, how may we study the ludic city to arrive at nuanced and critical insights of its unfolding?
- Second, what does the ludic city entail and what are its enchantments?

- Third, what is the relationship between the ludic city and everyday living?

In the concluding chapter, based on the findings of this thesis, I also offer some brief suggestions on how planning practice might be revised to make play spaces more useful, more open and more public.

To achieve its overall aim, this thesis engages at the broadest level with the conceptual apparatus of the geographies of encounter (Valentine 2008). This is a broad range of literature that focuses on the micro-politics of everyday public encounters and social interactions between strangers in the city. It has been argued that proximity in urban spaces does not automatically translate into meaningful contact; in fact, the converse has often been argued (Amin 2002). There is therefore a pressing need to investigate how public contact is orchestrated through the mediating of difference (Watson 2006; 2009). This may take place in the form of 'rubbing along' – a form of limited encounter between social subjects where recognition of different others is achieved through glancing and gazing, sharing space in talk or silence and simply seeing and being seen (Watson 2006). It may also take the form of more routinized, mundane and calculated social encounters that serve to maintain particular (and perhaps also singular) forms of encounter in urban space, as chapter five demonstrates. These outcomes will be determined through ethnographic analysis (chapters four and five) of the geographies of encounter in the spaces in question. The assemblages of the variegated outcomes in play spaces help to constitute the ludic city as it exists.

1.4 Aims and objectives

The overall aim of this thesis is to – through investigating the politics of co-existence in neighbourhood play spaces – advance new understandings of the ludic city and its imbrications with everyday living. To achieve this, I study two neighbourhood play spaces – the open field and the street football court. In these spaces, I map the relationship between the

boundaries created, the notions and practices of friendships that manipulate these boundaries, the possibilities of play and its enchantments that result and the imbrications of these ludic experiences with everyday living.

At this point, a definition of the key concepts that I use throughout this thesis is in order. First, boundaries serve to demarcate the different roles of people in urban space, as well as their level of access and the roles they may be allowed to perform (Stevens 2007). They can be material and discursive and often manifest in reality as a mix of both. An example of the former would be fences, barricades and exclusive spaces such as gated communities and country clubs. An example of the latter would be people shunning stigmatized neighbourhoods that promote a sense of danger and fear, even if statistics e.g. crime rate do not corroborate such perceived dangers.

Second, friendship can be loosely defined as the social formations and networks that come to endure through sharing a particular space for play. Friendship can be instrumental, whereby obligations to others, such as gifting or moral and physical support is leveraged to fulfill particular wants and needs. Of course, friendships are affective too, providing not only for a resilient and caring community but forming the basis of a collective belief for collective action, as seen in the empirical cases in this thesis. In short, friends are obliged to give to one another, and when friends give they consolidate their friendship.

Third, play is defined by Stevens (2007) as a) actions which are non-instrumental i.e. play as a pleasurable end in itself, b) actions through which people challenge corporeal, mental/ moral[1] and social limits in urban space and c) actions which very often involve unexpected, fleeting and sometimes risky encounters with strangers leading to new forms of urban sociality. Fourth, this thesis argues that play shares an intimate relationship with enchantment.

[1] 'Mental' and 'Moral' are placed together as morality and moral decisions are often a product of both the heart and mind.

The notion of enchantment, despite being given due attention in the social sciences, defies easy definition. It is agreed upon that it is an experience that ranges from basic satisfaction to whimsical wondrousness. It provides urban inhabitants with an energizing feeling of fullness, plenitude or liveliness (Bachelard 2001).

Accordingly, this thesis has two objectives. First, I show in chapter four how the open field is characterized by the lack of boundaries. This is maintained by the unique networks of friendship marked by frivolity, fleetingness and intense intimacy in the field. Access to the open field is constructed to include every user based on the generic principle of "brotherhood", and realized via the collective participation in ludic(rous) actions in the field. Play in the open field enchants its inhabitants physically, morally and socially by offering "opportunities for exploration and discovery, for the unexpected, the unregulated, the spontaneous and the risky" (Franck and Stevens 2013: 3). I end by showing how inhabitants who use this space do not actually desire a permanent escape from everyday life; the ludic city is a supplement to the rational lives of some urban inhabitants, and provides important moments of release that aid the wider reproduction of society.

In chapter five, I show how principal users construct a discursive boundary around what they perceive to be their street football court. Street football is represented as a serious endeavor, one that most Chinese teams are undeserving of enjoying because of their 'arrogant attitude' and 'poor footballing skills'. This is corroborated by the material perimeter of the court, illustrating a clear target for protection against 'outsiders'. These boundaries are maintained through a collective invocation of affective and instrumental obligations of friendship amongst the Malay users of the court. However, these boundaries are malleable; they are manipulated to include moments where 'good' Chinese teams are welcomed as a worthy challenge and when principal Malay teams indulge in absurd and non-instrumental play with

one another. I end by suggesting that the ludic city features centrally to the mundane lifeworlds of other inhabitants. The everyday routines of play in this space are inextricably linked to the everyday aspirations and lifeworlds of most of the Malay users of the court. The ludic city is in this case an important component for the reproduction of wider society – only this wider society is not measured in terms of economic development but social reproduction of a certain group of urban inhabitants.

Given the constraints of this thesis, I focus only on recreational football in Singapore. In Singapore, football is the most popular team activity. According to the National Sports Participation Survey conducted in 2005, 4.7% of the population aged 15 years and above participate regularly in recreational football[2]. Of course, this thesis cannot be an exhaustive evaluation of the ludic city in the context of Singapore, much less globally. This same research deployed on other cities and on other forms of play will likely produce different results and interpretations. What it does however is through in-depth ethnographic research to provide a starting point to understand the ludic city, its constitutive relationships and its imbrications with everyday living.

1.5 Thesis outline

I have in chapter one detailed the aims, objectives and significance of this research. Chapter two lays the conceptual foundation of the thesis. The first part of the chapter reviews a set of literature with the aim of answering two broad questions. First, how might we – thinking through the geographies of social encounter – unravel the ludic city and evaluate its politics of co-existence? Second, what is the ludic city and how does it enchant? It then proceeds to evaluate the concepts – boundaries, friendship play and enchantment – which form the components of the conceptual framework underpinning this thesis and explain how this is

[2] Data retrieved from the Sporting Culture Committee report published in April 2008. http://app.msf.gov.sg/portals/0/Summary/research/Sporting-Culture-Committee-Report.pdf

employed to achieve my aims and objectives. Chapter three describes the methodology of this thesis, the research design that follows and evaluates the methodological and ethical issues that arise through this research.

In chapters four and five, I investigate the politics of co-existence in the open field and the street football court respectively. I show how boundaries are created or dissolved by users of these spaces, and maintained through notions and practices of friendship. The resultant playful encounters in both chapters enchant their users in some similar but also vastly different ways, and share a different relationship with everyday living. This illustrates the variegated ways in which the ludic city can unfold. I end the thesis in chapter six by offering my response to the wider research questions set out in section 1.3. Drawing on the findings of this thesis, I also provide brief suggestions on how to make urban spaces more useful, more open and more public.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Overview

This chapter lays the conceptual foundation of the thesis. The literature review is organized to answer two broad questions. First, what is the ludic city? Second, how might we – thinking through the geographies of social encounter – unravel the ludic city and evaluate its politics of co-existence? Thereafter, I describe the concepts of *boundaries, friendship* and *play*. Together with the concept of *enchantment* described in section 2.2, these form the components of the conceptual framework that underpins this research. I conclude by explaining how the conceptual framework is employed to achieve the objectives and aims of this research.

2.2 The contemporary city: misanthropy and enchantment

It is almost inevitable that celebrations of modern urbanization are accompanied by their fair share of detractors. In terms of mobility, the idea(l) of the borderless world is quickly countered by the 'urban fear economy' of surveillance and security (Davis, 2002). Economically, the dire conditions of homelessness and bankruptcy created by political authority and intricate financial instruments are often seen as a means to the 'greater good' of the global economy marshalled and enjoyed by a select few cities. Materially, the flagrant lack of basic transport and sanitation infrastructure and access to basic living necessities such as food and shelter are juxtaposed against the state-of-the-art airports and universities found in advanced metropolises. Politically, the global march towards democracy and consensus is endlessly met by dissensus and what might be known in the mainstream as 'radicalism'. Culturally, the redevelopment of older neighbourhoods to facilitate the endless stream of shopping malls and global brands seen as a glistening homage to modernity by some is seen by others as a flagrant attack on local cultures and heritage.

This thesis is interested in the social aspect of the contemporary city. The misanthropic contemporary city has long been a common trope in urban representation (see Davis, 2002; Thrift, 2005; Amin, 2006 for recent examples). For many inhabitants, contemporary cities are exclusionary, mundane and alienating. In urban sociology, for example, this is couched in the concept of anomie. The anomic condition of the city – as scholars adopting a Weberian perspective contend – stems from modern urban life itself: an arena from which scientific and economic rationality had banished its wonder and serendipity (see Schneider, 1993). This is often complemented by a Durkheimian view characterized as a sudden disharmony of normative experiences and everyday expectations (Scott and Turner, 1965). That is, rapid changes in the urban fabric have led to a sensory overload culminating in a withdrawal of interactions amongst urban inhabitants and a culture of fear (Watson, 2006).

The reasons for urban misanthropy can therefore be surmised as twofold. One, it stems from the weariness of the mundane routine of everyday life. The idea of boredom studied in the social sciences is apt here. Boredom is argued to have emerged in response to the rise of highly standardized and repeated organizations of time–space (see Highmore, 2002). In each case "a set of familiar conceptual–empirical stories, respectively secularization, individualism, leisure and bureaucratization, are offered as explanations for the existence of boredom" (Anderson, 2004: 741). To the individual inhabitant, boredom is a meaningless experience of the material world. It crystallizes in a rationalized, intellectualized, world in which the nature of the material and the social is dulled.

Two, it emerges from the incessant growth of sites of proximity in urban spaces (see Valentine, 2008). This necessitates close encounters – people from different walks of life are brought together, leading to what Watson (2006) calls 'stranger danger'. This alludes to a fear of others who are different, unknown and therefore perceived to be threatening. It is also significantly an outcome of lack of exposure and familiarity with heterogeneous encounters

such that interacting with different others can range from uncomfortable to disconcerting. In her research on social encounters in the United Kingdom, for example, Watson (2006) reveals that most of her respondents' daily lives are marked by a homogeneous, not heterogeneous, form of sociality.

Yet, the city's potential as a repository of experiences that run counter to the disenchanting ones mentioned above is still held on to by urban scholars. Such hopeful belief is encapsulated by writings on the concept of enchantment. This is a concept that defies easy definition. Schneider (1993), one of the first to write extensively about enchantment, suggests that it is a process whereby our relationship with our urban and social worlds are (temporarily) transformed, producing an extraordinary experience or state-of-being. This could occur, Schneider notes, when urban inhabitants face something both real and uncanny simultaneously in their everyday lives, leaving them in awe and wonder. Bennett (2001: 104) writes similarly: "to be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and everyday… to be enchanted, then, is to participate in a momentarily immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound". Fisher (1998: 131) describes this experience as a "moment of pure presence". Yet, enchantment can also be seen as a ceaseless movement – a journey into the unknown and serendipitous, a journey that "turns back on itself, opens onto itself, revealing until then unheard of potentialities, entering into other connections, setting [things]… adrift in the direction of other assemblages [in the city]" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 349). This alludes to the fact that these experiences are always provisional, and can be formed by adding to or subtracting from other experiences and relational connections. Enchantment is therefore an odd combination of somatic effects – it is "to be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to both be caught up and carried away" (Bennett, 2001: 5). Given its definitional equivocality, it is hitherto inconclusive as to what enchantment precisely encapsulates.

What is concurred upon is that enchantment, according to Bachelard (2001: 4), provides urban inhabitants an energizing feeling of "fullness, plenitude or liveliness, a sense of having had one's nerves or circulation or concentration powers turned up or recharged". This promotes a (fleeting) return to childlike excitement about life (Bennett, 2001). This is important for two reasons. First, enchantment is regarded as an antidote to the disenchanting rationalities of modern urban life. It is slated to provide the inhabitant with opportunities to embrace the affirmation of the human (and urban) experience. By allowing for the arousal, exposure and satiation of personal and communal desires, it helps people to more fully be themselves. This self-realization is a fundamental trait for human existence (Stevens, 2007). Second, and of paramount importance, it provokes new ideas and perspectives on the geographies of encounter (Valentine, 2008): that is, the co-constitutive relationship between space and social interaction. This has implications not only within academia but for everyday living. For instance, Watson's (2009) enquiry on social encounters in the British marketplace highlights the potential of connecting, lingering and taking pleasure in a shared space. To Watson, such works represent an important counter-point to Putnam's (2001) pessimistic account on the decay of social association in the contemporary city and invites us to be more hopeful, as well as more specific on the potentialities and actualities of social encounters in the urban and their implications for the different groups involved. This opens up an 'ethics of care', where the social inclusion and care of those who are often marginalized elsewhere can be enacted in particular spaces.

Writings on enchantment thus represent both the aspiration for and critical inquiry of the realization of a city comprised of enchanting encounters. One way in which this has been

undertaken is the examination of the interface between inhabitant and the urban world[3] s/he inhabits. To instantiate, Bhatti et al (2009) highlight the private garden as an extraordinary space full of enchanting encounters. Gardening is taken to be a labour of love that highlights how enchanting encounters are created through this everyday domestic act that when undertaken, time seems to stand still in a specific place. More than this, through their interviews they unravel that gardens represent a collective of memories that mediate the experience of childhood, escape and innocence, as well as recollections of family members and key events. This exemplifies the notion of the safe haven, where inhabitants can temporarily suspend or even heal themselves from the alienating realities of everyday work and living (see Hitchings, 2003; Lorimer, 2005; Ginn, 2014 for similar work in this regard). Activities such as interventionist knitting in the city – in the form of yarn bombing (Price, 2015), street art (Young, 2010) and temporary initiatives such as pop-up parks (Glover, 2015) have also been considered for their potential to enchant.

Enchantment is something that we encounter in the world, something that can hit us unexpectedly, but it is also a comportment that is a result of human strategy (Bennett, 2001). Beyond the urban-human interface, scholars have sought to analyse and theorize *in situ* the encounters between urban inhabitants and the proximities, distances and spatialities they create, maintain and attenuate. For instance, in contrast to the constrained sociality and partial forms of enchantment associated with mega-malls (Goss, 1993), studies of alternative trading spaces such as car boot sales and pop-up malls have asserted the significance of these spaces for a different kind of engagement. Gregson and Crewe (1997: 87) argue that car boot sales function as spaces of unpredictable and spontaneous playful encounter where "the conventions of retailing are suspended, and where participants come to engage in and produce

[3] This 'enchanting' interface has also been studied in terms of the hybridity and relationality of human and non-human worlds, for instance, through human-dolphin encounters (see Servais, 2005 and Halloy and Servais, 2014 for example). This is however outside the scope of this thesis and has therefore been omitted from discussion.

theatre, performance, spectacle and laughter". In her analysis of street vending and garage sales, Crawford (1999: 34) assert that these informal activities bring disparate groups together, engendering a condition where social fluidity "begins to break down the separate, specialised and hierarchical structures of everyday life". To this end, urban scholars have sought to broaden their engagement with the multiplex encounters in urban space by focusing on ordinary, everyday sites and mobilities. These have been growing healthily in the literature and run the gamut from everyday bus travel (Wilson, 2011), immigrant integration projects (Matejskova and Leitner, 2011) and the marketplace (Watson, 2009). In these studies, accounts of inclusive sociality and (not so) theatrical performances that may or may not lead to enchantment are highlighted.

2.3 The ludic city: of play and enchantment

In the vast literature on social encounters, enchantment is presented as a social experience. This is in itself is a valuable strand of research that requires continued engagement. Yet, as this thesis does, incorporating 'play' as a category of practice into this analysis can help to extend our conceptions on what it means to be enchanted. Here, Stevens' (2007) definition of 'play' is important:

- actions which are non-instrumental i.e. play as a pleasurable end in itself
- actions through which people challenge corporeal and mental[/moral] limits in urban space
- actions which very often involve unexpected, fleeting and sometimes risky encounters with strangers leading to new forms of urban sociality

Taken this way, this thesis shows that enchantment is a corporeal, mental/ moral and social experience. Thinking the urban experience through play is important as it unravels the idea

that living in the urban is more than social – it is also very much experienced in the body, heart and mind.

Research on play dates back to the 1960s. French sociologist, Roger Caillois' (1961) monograph – *Man, Play and Games*, according to Henricks (2010: 157), is "a kind of sociological or anthropological study, an attempt to categorize certain forms of play and to describe how these forms operate in societies". At the time of its publication, Caillois's account was what Hughes describes as "[a book] in which a fugue is played upon a few simple themes elaborated by material from a great variety of cultures" (1962, 254). In this sense, the work is, as Hughes continues, a "speculation about gradual, universal evolution," a look at how types of play have both responded to the qualities of societies and made possible their development. This strand of research has continued into the 1990s, where most notably, geographer John Bale (1993; 2003) sought to study place from the perspective of space, place and identity. His concerns include the geographical bases of modern sport, the growth and globalization of sport, the regional dimensions of sport and the sites, sights and senses in sport. Such works on play and sport, while avant-garde in their own right, ignore the fact that play is fundamentally a social phenomenon that can occur in micro and ordinary spaces, between ordinary people.

Perhaps, as this thesis suggests, it is through a more ethnographic foray into play in urban spaces that the interface between play and enchantment can be properly enquired. That the "human being has the need to accumulate energies and to spend them, even waste them in play" (Lefebvre, in Kofman and Lebas 1996: 147) suggests not only that play is a fundamental need for the urban inhabitant, but alludes to its potential for promoting enchanting encounters between urban inhabitants. As Lefebvre further suggests:

> The form of the urban, its supreme reason, namely simultaneity and encounter, cannot disappear… as a place of encounters, focus of communication and information, the *urban* becomes what it always was: place of desire, permanent disequilibrium, seat of the dissolution of normalities and constraints, the moment of play and of the unpredictable (Lefebvre, 1996: 129, original emphasis).

There is therefore a crucial need to think about play in relation to enchantment in the urban (see Lennard and Lennard 1984; Dargan and Zeitlin 1990; Borden 2001; Franck and Stevens 2013 for some works that have indirectly adopted this direction of research).

In this regard, the ludic city can be viewed as a conceptual apparatus that seeks to extend engagement with the interface of play and enchantment in the urban (Stevens, 2007). In his monograph *The Ludic City*, notwithstanding its focus on public space from a planning point of view, Stevens' (2007) detailed theoretical engagement with the concept of play is useful. Despite only employing the term 'enchantment' very sparingly in the book, Stevens' definitions and analysis of play largely imbricate with the theoretical and empirical contributions of the work that has been presented in this section of the thesis. I expand on his main definitions here.

Overall, play is a set of actions opposed to the rationalities of everyday life; that which is valued inherently as an end. The rational city suggests that its inhabitants pursue their fulfillment of needs within a given ethical framework. Immediate gratification is to be deferred in the name of future pleasure or comfort. Yet it is only when people's actions are not locked into the service of future goals that their actions become liberated to explore the value of being human (Stevens 2007). What life "allows in the way of order and reserve has meaning only from the moment when the ordered and reserved forces liberate and lose themselves for ends that cannot be subordinated to anything one can account for" (Bataille

1985: 128). The value of play lies in its opposition to instrumental behaviour – seriousness; morality and productivity, as well as the power relations these value structures help reproduce (Spariosu 1989). Play is "spontaneous and creative, a counterpoint to the tedium and exploitation inherent in instrumental labour…. it is the domain of freedom from compulsion" (Gilloch 1996: 84). This value is seen also in the exploratory pursuit of pleasure, free from the constraints of rational thinking. This sense of exploration is encapsulated in the image of Baudelaire's urban *flâneur*:

> The *flâneur* is defined as a constant seeker of impressions and stimuli…. But he does so in a spirit of idle curiosity, without any object of learning anything or reaching understanding…. The *flâneur*, then, cultivates polymorphousness and discontinuity in leisure…. He makes a virtue out of idleness and values the sense above reason (Rojek 1995: 91).

Seen this way, play is counterposed to the idea that every human action must culminate in a predetermined change in the material or social world. Play is gratuitous and is neither undergirded by social, political and cultural contexts nor a conduit to achieve ethical or material social outcomes. It is in many instances an occasion of pure waste: a "waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money" (Caillois 1961: 5). Yet, this waste is not misuse but a process filled with profound and bounteous human experience i.e. enchantment, a process involving the discharge of surplus energy which Lefebvre (1991) deems to be a necessary and fundamental characteristic of urban living.

Specifically, Stevens (2007) notes that play affords the opportunity to create, test and push the thresholds of existing corporeal, mental/ moral and social limits. He explains the first two categories through using Caillois' (1961) concept of vertigo. Vertigo includes variegated behaviours and actions through which one escapes normal bodily experience and self-control.

These actions include sliding, jumping, falling, dancing, spinning and moving at speed. These are slated to promote the "voluptuous experience of fear, thrills and shock that causes a momentary loss of self-control", an experience which allows one to transgress the normal perception of the world and bodily practice within it (Caillois 1961: 169). Corporeal vertigo can also be a direct confrontation between the body and the physical environment. The body endeavours to overcome the risks presented by the environment, including but not limited to height, scale, speed and traction (Stevens 2007). The pleasure inhering to play in this context is both the exposure to such risks and the endeavor for the body's mastery over the same risks. This creates for the player on the one hand "a world without rules in which [he/ she] constantly improvises…. [letting oneself] drift and become intoxicated through feeling directed, dominated and possessed by strange powers" (Caillois 1961: 75-78) and on the other a desire for "training in self-control, an arduous effort to preserve calm and equilibrium…. to neutralize the dangerous effects of [vertigo]" (Caillois 1961: 31). Such experiences are most apparent in the domain of 'extreme sport' undertaken in the city, where activities like skateboarding (see Borden 2001) and parkour (see Mould 2009) necessitate that the body challenge and master itself in order to overcome the risks presented in the urban environment. For Saville (2008), parkour is a spatially transformative act which both attempts to and can prevent comfortable closure in the human-urban interface. He notes that when one practices for the sake of mastering unconventional movement through space, such mastery, as it occurs (or not) is always accompanied by an emotional refiguring of spatial possibilities. Seen this way, parkour speaks quite forcefully to an enchanted notion of place which, through wonderment, imagination and embodied participation, is in continuous composition (Fenton 2005; Amin and Thrift 2004). The extended and serious practice of parkour is a quest – a search for new and more elaborate imaginings; it is an unravelling of possible, but not necessarily attainable, mobilities in the urban.

Vertiginous play also involves the transgression of mental/ moral faculty. In practice, this emerges through actions such as breaking objects, making loud and uncontrolled noises, taunting, confrontations and, in the extreme, fighting. These actions are "linked to the desire for disorder and destruction, a drive which is normally repressed" (Caillois 1961: 24) by ethical codes of conduct in the city that alienate inhabitants from a sense of agency within the social world (Stevens 2007: 42). Inasmuch as these acts generate intense sensations, their focus is not on the fissure of perception but social propriety. They are veritable expressions of individuality "in rebellion against every type of code, rule and organization" (Caillois 1961: 157). These acts are a conduit to the liberation of the individual "from the burden of memory and from the terrors of social responsibilities and pressures" (Caillois 1961: 51), allowing those who undertake them to do so without any ethics or conscience. Taken together, the concept of vertiginous play embraces risk for the affirmation of the human experience. By allowing for the arousal, exposure and satiation of forbidden corporeal and mental desires, it helps people to more fully be themselves.

Play is also seen to create unexpected encounters between strangers that may lead to new and endless possibilities for sociality and social organization. How it unfolds is premised on the social conditions present: the density and diversity of people, the mixing of their activities, their variegated backgrounds and values, the unpredictability of their behaviour, their expectations and the unfamiliarity of their expressions in public space. The possibilities which social play can take in the city are potentially endless. Certain overarching principles underpin public interaction between strangers such that everyone can partake in the city's social intensity and complexity. The principles of 'civil inattention' and 'civility towards diversity' (Goffman 1980) encapsulate the freedom and social distance to act playfully with one another. Inhabitants in public ignore, watch or react to the playful actions of others. The reactions of all who are present in a particular time-space in some way define and legitimize or invalidate

the boundaries of play. According to Caillois (1961: 39-40), playful actions "generally attain their goal only when they stimulate an echo of complicity…. games…. seem to reflect stimulus and response…. and effervescence or shared tension". Play events in public find their value in encouraging bystanders to join in spontaneously resulting in a more active level of engagement and by inspiring similar or related events to occur.

2.4 The ludic city: thinking through geographies of encounter

The ludic city is a clarion call for an urban world that enchants its inhabitants through playful encounter. Yet, for this to be achieved, there first needs to be an understanding of the nature of enchantment and the ways in which such enchantment is created and experienced. Following Parkinson (2013), the presence of public spaces does not guarantee apolitical encounters between different users. Public space is inherently political, and there are scripts for encounters embedded within which ensure that rigid standards of behaviour are adhered to. These scripts can be created by states, private corporations and the different users of public space themselves. The point here is that while power relations that determine the use of public space are rightly influenced by metropolitan, national and even global forces (capitalist or otherwise), they too are influenced and controlled by the users of space themselves.

The specific needs and wants of a population constituted by a smorgasbord of urban identities must also be attended to. To borrow from Purcell (2002), the concept of inhabitant is not limited to a single social category, nor can it realistically be conflated into one. It opens up "the definition of the political subject to include a range of different identities and political interests" (2002: 106) such as [ethnicity], class, gender, sexuality and in the case of this thesis, play that can hardly be reconciled into a universal ideal. The variegated identities of urban inhabitants mean varying conceptions of the use of urban space. This leads to inevitable

contradictions between different needs and wants and therefore invariably conflict and negotiation over urban space. The issues that belie interactions in neighbourhood play spaces thus lie in the micro-geographies of these spaces.

I argue that to a) make sense of the ludic city as it actually unfolds and b) comment on its value for the urban experience, there is a need to think the ludic city through its geographies of encounter. This wide and varied set of literature (some of which has been alluded to in section 2.2) is concerned with the "implicit role of shared space in providing opportunities for encounters between strangers… [and] the importance of contact in mediating difference" (Valentine 2008: 323). Some scholars acknowledge and celebrate the little initiatives. For example, Laurier and Philo (2006) claim simple acts such as holding doors, sharing seats and so on represent an action of togetherness – a facet of mutual acknowledgement. Laurier et al. (2002: 353) write: "The massively apparent fact is that people in cities do talk to one another as customers and shopkeepers, passengers and cab-drivers, members of a bus queue, regulars at cafes and bars, tourists and locals, beggars and by-passers, Celtic fans, smokers looking for a light, and of course … as neighbours". Amin (2006: 1012) refers to such cursory exchanges as "small achievements in the good city". Likewise, Thrift (2005) asserts that the mundane friendliness that characterises many everyday urban public encounters represents the fostering of a basic democracy. He talks about much overlooked geographies of kindness and compassion and the potential for translating these into a wider scale (Thrift 2005). Boyd (2006) goes further to suggest that civility has a vital place in contemporary urban life and should be understood as a form of pluralism.

Equally, negative perspectives on social encounter remain – and for good reason. Thrift (2005: 135) notes that there has been renewed interest in work on agnostic politics in the city – that is, "politics which are willing to tolerate a depiction of societies as not premised on the maintenance of shared orders, but as, in large part, being the result of the carving out of very

different worlds, worlds which cannot be expected to reach agreement and which even obdurately disagree because they do not even hold in common shared premises about the world". Sennett (1996) and more recently Bauman (2003) have similarly expressed concerns about the increasing tendency for individuals and groups to withdraw into mutually reinforcing homogeneous groups – a tendency referred to as 'mixophobia'. Such mixophobia can lead to the creation of stereotypes as well as their perpetuation when isolated cases of conflict occur between 'different' individuals and groups (Sibley 1995).

To think the ludic city through geographies of encounter entails thinking through difference – specifically, the ways in which individuals and groups create and maintain boundaries and mitigate these differences in specific social and spatial contexts (Purcell 2008). Following Amin (2006):

> The good city might be thought of as the challenge to fashion a progressive politics of well-being and emancipation out of multiplicity and difference and from the particularities of the urban experience. This is a politics of small gains and fragile truces that constantly need to be worked at, but which can add up, with resonances capable of binding difference as well as reining in the powerful and the abusive.

In so doing, the ludic city as it exists – one that is constituted by an assemblage of (inter)actions leading to variegated, multiple and overlapping moments of play and enchantment that might conform to, diverge from or exceed the ideal of the ludic city.

2.5 Important concepts

This section elaborates on the important concepts that underpin the conceptual framework of this thesis.

2.5.1 Boundaries

Boundaries in urban space serve to demarcate the different roles of people in urban space, as well as their level of access and the roles they may be allowed to perform. They can be material and social, and often manifest in reality as a mix of both. Material boundaries are most commonly seen in the form of walls, barricades, fences as well as privately-owned spaces. Social boundaries are equally instrumental – they are created by people through discursive and material means. The actions which are acceptable in urban spaces are tightly regulated by both spatial design and non-spatial means (Dovey 1999). For example, amenities like benches and play areas for children found in shopping malls are designed so that they accommodate only a certain number of users at once and certain actions by these users. These spaces are usually very small and barricaded to prevent too many simultaneous users as well as structured to discourage any unintended uses such as rowdy and dangerous play. Further, such spaces are always under the surveillance of security personnel and security cameras. The simulations of looseness are thus in fact forms of discreet (or sometimes overt) tightening to create and maintain dominant orderings in space (Franck and Stevens 2013).

In relation to play, Trouille (2013) examines how a group of primarily Latino immigrant men claim and control a sought-after and contested public football field in a West Los Angeles public park. Control is exercised through informal authority – discursively through the acknowledgement of a few ‘leaders’ whose directives are followed, and materially through the handing out of kits only to those who are selected to play by these ‘leaders’. Measures are taken – such as withholding jerseys to those who do not conform to the boundaries set – to sanction disobedience and reinforce hierarchies.

Boundaries in the spaces of the city however – such as those in shopping malls, festival streets and in-between spaces – possess multiple and shifting meanings rather than clarity of function (Crawford 1992). They present the opportunity for people, through their own

variegated initiatives, to create, maintain and destroy the possibilities of encounter in space. Gap sites are a good way to instantiate this. These are spaces usually publically owned but without any assigned function, such as the open fields adjacent to housing estates. In implementing certain actions within these spaces, people create possibility, diversity and disorder (Franck and Stevens 2013). Possibility is characterized by the indeterminate outcomes that take on the potential to be realized in space: activities previously unanticipated; activities that have no place in the rational city and activities that benefit from a lack of control and constraint. Diversity is the myriad activities that can occur and overlap in space, where existing activities break up into smaller parts and each of these parts randomly coalesce with other activities to form new parts. Contact with new and unexpected sources of play is a source of learning for urban inhabitants. Disorder is the disarray that results from the smorgasbord of overlapping and sometimes conflicting activities in a shared space. This, however, invites inhabitants to take the initiative in imagining and fabricating their own arrangements of space and finding alternative uses. Actions undertaken may arouse subconscious or foreign desires and be undertaken against good sense; they push the limits of what is socially and physically acceptable behaviour in public and in so doing establish new possibilities of use in public space. Inhabitants who undertake such initiatives declare their right to the city and verify it through their practice (Iveson 2013).

2.5.2 Friendship

Thinking through geographies of encounter is a good way to understand the politics of co-existence i.e. the mechanisms in which boundaries are created, maintained, manipulated in urban space. Specifically, this thesis suggests that using friendship as a conceptual lens offers an innovative means of unravelling and interrogating the urban politics of co-existence (Kathiravelu 2013). According to Bunnell et al (2012), the notion of friendship has hitherto

occupied a marginal position in geographical research. These are notions "more likely to be consigned to the preface or acknowledgements of books and articles than to feature in conceptualization or substantive content" (2012: 490). However, four aspects of emerging research on friendship are central to unraveling how boundaries are created, maintained and manipulated in the geographies of social encounter.

First, friendship is geographical in nature. Material spaces such as schools (Laws and Kelly 2005), workplaces (Sias and Cahill 1998), pubs (Coakley 2002), forests (Dyson 2010) – and in this thesis play spaces – constitute the nature of friendships. More importantly, friendships themselves produce "lived spatialities that can confer or deny particular freedoms, fears and possibilities" (Bunnell et al 2012: 491). Friendships, as a category of practice, remake social relations and experience in lived space (Soja 1996).

Second, friendship must move beyond associations with only dyadic, informal relations. Eve (2002) brings our attention the conceptualization of friendship as multiple chains of connections between groups of people and clusters of friend-like relations. Such networks are not merely important in themselves but play a role in wider processes of social ordering and transformation. This means that inasmuch as friendships can enable transgressions of well-established social relations in space encapsulated in the concept of loose space, these can also reinforce geographies of exclusion and strengthen dominant orderings in space in which full and proper access to particular spaces are only accorded to particular groups of friends (Adams and Allan 1998).

Third, friendship is often valorized for both its affective and instrumental qualities. Bunnell et al (2012) argue that friendship is the product of a human need for contact and interaction. Such intimacy is important in "keeping cities resilient and caring" (Thrift 2005: 146) – a necessary search for such relationships as an antidote to the alienation associated with

neoliberal urbanism. Friendship is also instrumental. They are strategic alliances to fulfill particular wants and needs. These are relations where intimacy may or may not be present, but is largely subsumed under the instrumental utility that the friendship affords. In reality, friendship is a mutually constitutive mix of affection and instrumentality (Cole 2009). Mains (2013), in his ethnographic examination of friendships in urban Ethiopia, shows how relationships among friends are supported by mutually constitutive relations of affection and exchange. Gifting, sharing and acts of service are obligatory for inhabitants whose fortunes have recently risen; friends of an "individual who has experienced good luck expect their fortunes to rise as well" (Mains 2012: 128). This can take the form of buying coffee or lunch, or other acts of service such as giving rides. What is noteworthy in Mains' work is that affection features just as importantly as material gain to these inhabitants. Gifts that are not reciprocated with affection associated with friendship cause feelings of distress; conflicts occur "when a friend prioritizes material gain over the maintenance of affection" (Mains 2013: 340). The point here is that while gifting is a display of affection, the maintenance of affection exceeds the sole act of gifting and must include other acts of service or words of affirmation. The intensity of affection between friends and the quality of gifts provided overlap in a complex relationship.

Fourth, friendship provides a soft touch of intimacy which is not only increasingly important but practical in a world where inhabitants are involved in complex networks of obligations and interests. Friendships, unlike kinship or romantic relationships, offer in some ways a non-committal model of intimacy, empathy and compassion which allows members of a network in give and receive in ways that sit well with 'more important' commitments in their lives such as family and work. Put simply, in most cases, friendship is a means of social organization where its members can attach and disconnect with one another at will, and decide upon the amount of work that goes into maintaining or deepening the friendship. This

reflects the different networks of friendship which are often characterized by different gradations that can feature simultaneously in the lives of urban inhabitants.

2.5.3 Play

I have in section 2.3 described play in relation to its ability to culminate in experiences of enchantment. Here I describe a typology of play that overlaps in some ways with the above definitions but also makes clear the ways in which play is structured as it is performed. According to Caillois (1961), all play activities can be evaluated along a continuum between *paidia* and *ludus*. *Paidia* and *ludus* can be considered the philosophy of play, highlighting that escape from instrumentality can take expression either in the complete resistance to rules or in the observance of different – and in many cases more constricting – rules (Stevens 2007).

Paidia is considered the purest form of play. It is characterized by destruction, spontaneity, fleetingness, caprice and absurdity. It is the human body acting without ethical deliberation, which enhances one's awareness of his actions as a causal effect of reality. *Paidia* is both a refusal to operate within the constraints presented by the rational city and an obstinate transgression of these constraints. Without a civilizing function, its improvisatory nature allows the exploration and transgression of possibilities for social and individual action and experience which can either start anew at every instance or crystallize into new social forms. In chapter five, I show how play as *Paidia* both produces and is reinforced by the concept of loose space.

Ludus is play that has been institutionalized. It follows rules, scripts and routines which are purposefully made to be onerous. Play is this sense is a "secondary and gratuitous activity, undertaken and pursued for pleasure" (Caillois 1961: 32). This pleasure, however, is retrieved as an act of vengeance against the injury or exploitation caused to one by the dominant

structures of work and urban life (Caillois 1961). To institutionalize new rules is to set new terms of engagement between oneself and the others who participate in an activity of play. The pleasure of *ludus* thus lies in both the development and mastery of play technique and the mastery of the set framework external to the demands of instrumental function (Stevens 2007). In chapter four, I show how play as *ludus* reinforces the dominant orderings of tight space.

2.5.4 Conceptual framework

Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework

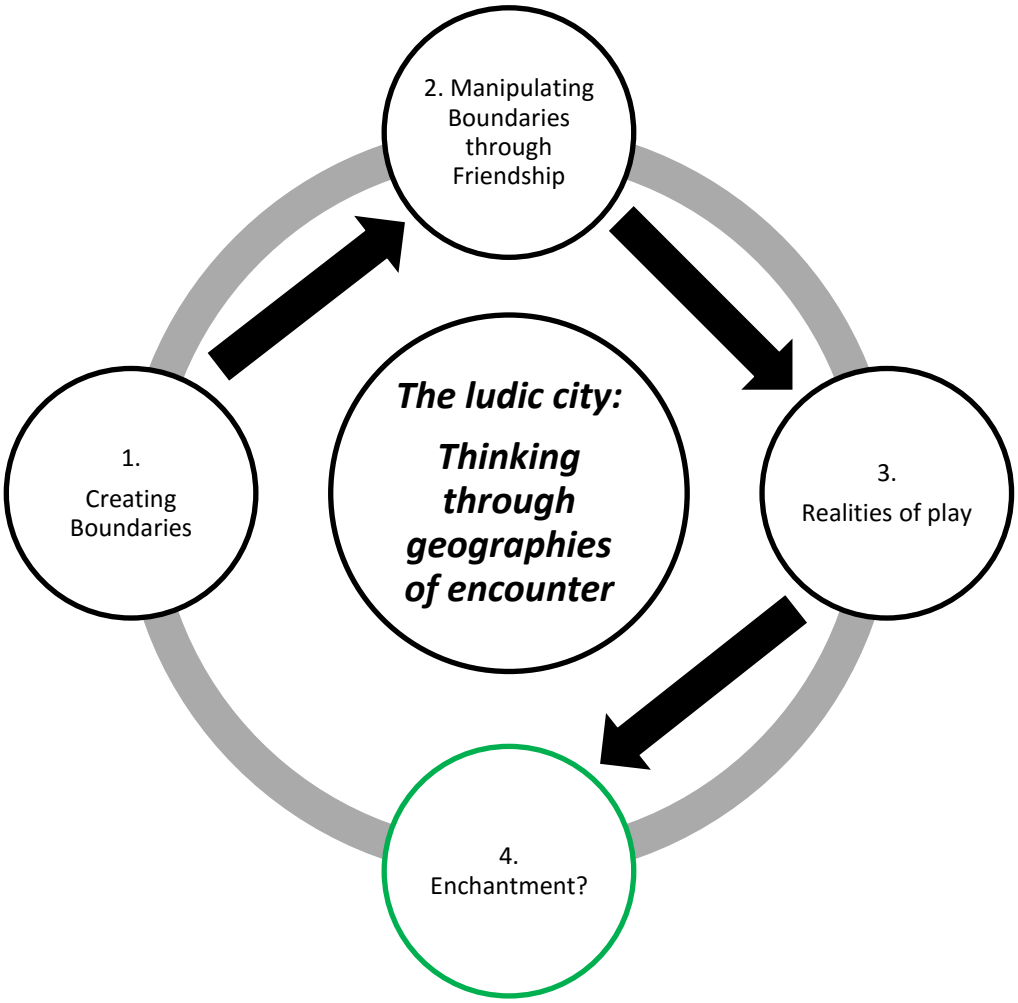


Figure 2.1 represents the conceptual framework for this thesis. The ludic city is a way of thinking about the micro-politics of play in urban space and what this means to urban

inhabitants. It seeks to ask four specific questions. One, how do individuals and groups create boundaries in neighbourhood play spaces? Two, how is friendship implicated in the maintenance and manipulation of these boundaries? Three, what playful encounters ensue and how are these enchanting? Four, what is the nature of these enchanting encounters and how can they help us understand the realities of the ludic city?

3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Overview

The methodological assumptions on which researchers work determine the research design. This in turn determines how knowledge is constructed (Proctor 1999). This chapter describes the methodology that undergirds this research, the research design that follows and evaluates the issues that arise through this research. Thinking ethically and reflexively about research methodology and methods is important because it minimizes the harm arising to the subjects of the research and engages them in the co-production of knowledge (see Nagar and Ali 2003).

3.2 Methodological inspirations

This research is driven by the principles of ethnographic fieldwork. Rather than – for the sake of a particular research project – simply entering, gathering data, and then leaving the field, ethnographic fieldwork requires the researcher to be immersed fully in the chosen field of study, learning both the everyday and extraordinary stuff of social and cultural life by 'being there' (Lewis and Russell 2011). This means spending a lengthy period in the field and engaging thoroughly with the actors present – long enough, ideally, to observe and experience a full cycle of activity (Wolcott 1988). This entails that the researcher embeds him or herself within the research setting to experience the mundane and rare, brash and nuanced aspects of socio-cultural life and, through observations, participative encounters and both facetious and purposeful conversations, to come to an understanding of it.

The intent to more fruitfully uncover and understand the everyday mobilities, interactions, perceptions and lived experiences of people has given rise to mobile methods of ethnography. Amongst these is the 'go along' (Kusenbach 2003). The go along is a process where in place of static interviews or participant observation, researchers accompany informants

(individually or in small groups) as they go about their everyday routines. During this process, the researcher – through asking questions, probing for interesting stories, listening and observing – actively explores their informants' experiences and perceptions as the latter move through their physical and social environment. Go alongs are a more systematic and outcome-oriented method than simply 'being there' or 'hanging out' with informants. They strive to capture informants' practices and interpretations *in situ*.

This is so that two main problems are addressed. First, go alongs circumvent the problem of not being able to access information "that do not lend themselves to narrative accounting, such as the pre-reflective knowledge and practices of the body, or the most trivial details of day-to-day environmental experience" (Kusenbach 2003: 462). Second, they circumvent the problems in a traditional sit-down interview. Sit down interviews, due to their highly structured nature, discourage context-sensitive and 'natural' interaction between the researcher and informant. Potential responses are also affected by the distractions of the surroundings or by the self-censorship of informants. Through narrating their actions and experiences as they go about their routines, the less accessible, non-verbalized regions of informants' minds are stimulated. It thus requires that the researcher takes a more active role towards shaping the agenda of the go along in accordance to the paths and actions that informants take. To ensure that these innermost practices and interpretations are authentically captured, go alongs work best only when informants are allowed to take as per normal the paths they do on a daily basis and engage in the activities they would with or without being the subjects of a research project.

The go along is seen as a general methodological framework that circumvents the weaknesses of conducting participant observation and interviews in silo. In practice, the go-along has taken variegated forms, for different objectives and to different outcomes. For example, in Laurier's (2004) research on 'doing office work on the motorway', he rides along with his

informants as they juggle between driving on the motorway and working as they do. Laurier has, in this case, to switch between roles of researcher, company for the driver, a calming influence in times of frustration and as the driver's second pair of eyes on the road. In my previous research (Teo 2014) I followed four informants as they went about their daily routine in their neighbourhoods. I had to balance between sticking to the research objectives and being a companion to my informant. Constant vacillations had to be made between probing for more interesting insight and nodding supportively or consoling informants while they narrated their beautiful or forlorn lives as they moved through their neighbourhoods. These examples show that the go-along is a set of methodological principles that in practice can never be followed precisely. The onus is on the researcher to balance between staying true to the principles of the go-along and modifying the research design and the roles that he or she may play according to the unique circumstances of the research. In this research, my participants move along the same space. That is, their encounters do not entail that they move through different spaces. However, the principles of the go-along apply – by moving along with them in these spaces, I extend my role to become more than an observer: I too, participate in the same encounters as they do.

Extant research on the go-along has thus far been blind to the issue of *access* and this merits some discussion here. Access to the certain sites of play i.e. street football courts studied in this research is predicated upon membership in a team of friends, and access to this membership is largely based upon, amongst other traits, sporting ability. Even in the gap sites which are generally open and inclusive, possessing such traits enables a better integration with the users of the space. As with any research project, the positionality of the researcher can either create possibilities or diminish them. As an experienced footballer who has played at competitive level, one who understands the 'etiquette' of joining a new team (for example, playing in whatever position assigned to you) and one who is well versed in 'football speak'

(for example about the Premier League, which is Singapore's most spectated professional football league), I was generally welcome to join teams on a regular basis after playing with them for the first time. Playing with my informants on a regular basis is important for two reasons. First, it allows for us – especially if we possess some level of chemistry playing and 'hanging out' together – to build rapport, albeit to some extent contrived (Section 3.4). This rapport is important because it paves the way for me to speak to my informants about the issue of playing football in the particular site and the related issues that arise. Second, and more importantly, 'being there' privies me to the social and cultural habitus unique to each particular context, meaning that my informants will not struggle with the embarrassment, awkwardness or tedium of having to explain what could be construed as extremely mundane practices and interpretations (Hitchings 2012). It also means that I will be able to more fruitfully understand the stories that my respondents tell.

In my own research, I make certain improvisations according to the circumstances of the research. Because my informants will most definitely be preoccupied when they are playing a game of football (not to mention myself if I too am playing), there is certainly no way for me to access their practices and interpretations simultaneous to the activity (cf Burkitt 2002). I however stick to the principles of the go-along, for my informants to take the paths and actions that they would most naturally take on an everyday basis i.e. play football in their neighbourhood and for me to follow and experience with them this regular occurrence. Doing so allows me to access *in situ* my informants' perceptions and experiences of the activities still fresh in their minds as we chat informally about the games that just took place, or as my informants have come to term – "gossip". This also allows me to probe for information and responses to wider issues related to the day's happenings.

If the purpose of the go-along is to access information that does not lend itself to narrative accounting, it would seem ironic to talk about these after the fact, something which Thrift and

Dewsbury (2000) assert can only provide an unsatisfactory account of what previously took place. Recent research that set out to study mundane social practice appears reticent about the role of talking in their research (Hitchings 2012). Bissell (2010) underlines how important aspects of routine rail travel lie outside the discursive and can only be satisfactorily apprehended through auto-ethnographic work. Although Spinney (2009) spoke with his cyclist informants about their routine experiences, he augmented these interviews with accompanied rides and video recordings. It seems then, that habitus developed over time and through routinized activity are unlikely to be subject to much examination thereafter (Bourdieu 1990). However, Jenkins (1992) contends that there is scope for reflexivity in Bourdieu's model. While Bourdieu tells us that social situations are structured by habitus, he concedes that there is considerable scope for improvisations that are conscious and therefore reportable. Informants are fully capable of evaluating their mundane practices and this could quite viably be initiated through talk. By initiating and participating in 'gossip' with my informants before, after and as they go about their routinized activities in football spaces, I follow closely the principles of the go-along methodology while making improvisations that allow me to address or circumvent the practical issues that arise through the research.

3.3 Research design

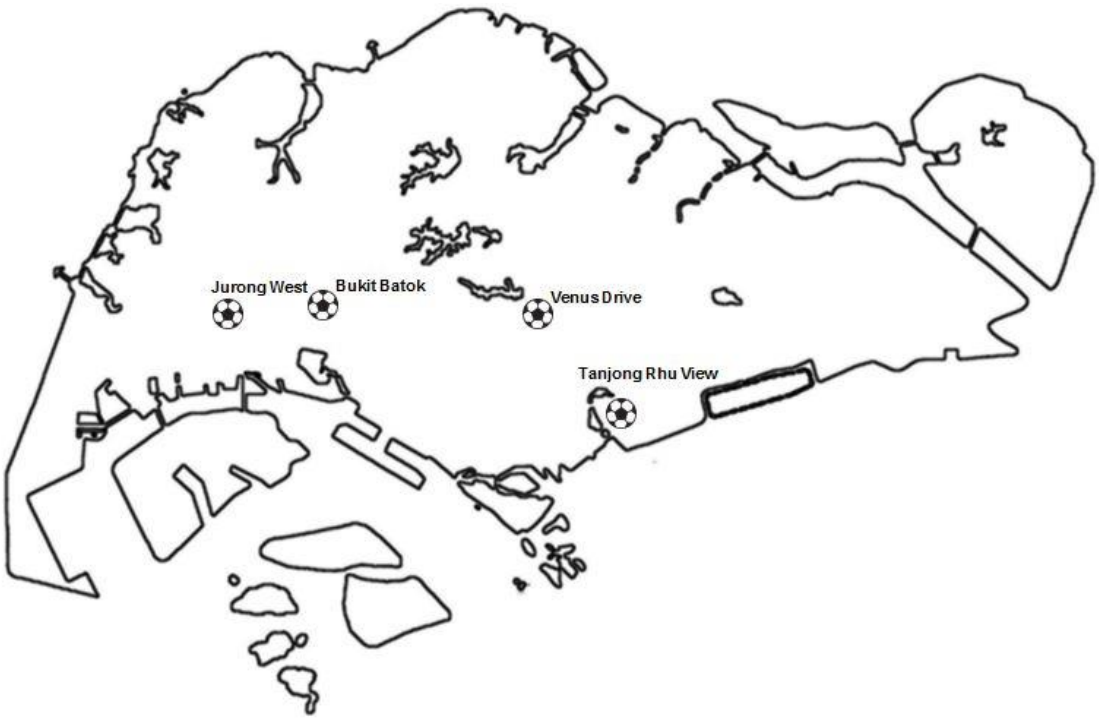
In this research, I study two types of sites – neighbourhood street football courts and gap sites in the form of open fields that sit in between residential buildings. At the broadest level, going-along and gossiping with my informants was done with uncovering their everyday practices and experiences in their use of these sites and more broadly, the micro-politics of football at neighbourhood level in mind. The data garnered from informants seek to address these broad research questions:

- What are the boundaries in neighbourhood spaces of play and how are these created?
- How are these boundaries policed and to what ends?
- What can the outcomes of play tell us about the nature of enchantment?

Table 3.1 Research design

S/N	*Address*	*General Location*	*Duration of Research*	*Frequency of participation*
Neighbourhood street football court				
1	Jurong West Street 65	West	25/8/14 – 19/9/14	Thrice a week
2	Bukit Batok Central	West	22/9/14 – 17/10/14	
Open field				
1	Tanjong Rhu View	South	2/11/2014– 30/11/2014	Twice a week
2	Venus Drive	Central		

Plate 3.1 Research sites



3.3.1 Street football courts

Table 3.1 and plate 3.1 show the sites that have been selected for this research. The two street football courts were selected because I had frequented these in my secondary school and junior college days (13-18 years old). I am thus aware of the richness of data that can be captured by going-along in these courts. In my vast experience playing in street football courts around Singapore, I consider these two sites emblematic of a 'typical' street football court in Singapore and thus able to shed generalizable insight on the micro-politics of play in Singapore. This is juxtaposed against public courts that are underutilized and those that are almost exclusively only available through booking and thus feature a very contained environment where friends arrange to use the court at a predetermined time.

To gain access at each of these courts, I first made three trips to each of these courts on separate weekday evenings (5pm-7pm) where I would stand around and observe the on-goings in these sites. Once I was certain that there was enough activity going on in these courts, I returned as a player looking for a team to play with. I was lucky enough to be able to join in with teams from each site and after a week of 'pre-research' where I targeted two 'principal' teams i.e. a team using the court on a daily basis and dominating over other teams in terms of footballing quality (Henceforth, players in these teams will be known as 'principals'). In both sites, the teams selected were predominantly composed of Malay players. This reflects in general the superior footballing quality of Malay players[4]. I fully expected other teams to join me and my respondents in our gossip once I had established a familiar presence in these sites. After playing with my selected teams once, I acquired the contact of their 'captain' and arranged with him to meet at the courts for subsequent sessions of play. All four teams (two from each site) were happy to have me because I was deemed to

[4] It is difficult to quantify the difference in standards of football between races in Singapore. However, the consensus on the ground is that Malay players dominate the local football scene, from neighbourhood to professional level (see http://therealsingapore.com/content/singapore-football-has-too-many-malays).

be a positive addition to the team, perhaps due to my footballing ability, knowledge of football and respectfulness. Even during the days where my selected teams were not playing, I was able to join with other teams who had some impression of who I was.

Street football games feature many stoppages. A team loses after conceding a set amount of goals (usually two) and has to exit the court and wait their turn for their next opportunity to play. Waiting times can be long, ranging from twenty to fourty-five minutes. This, to me, was the perfect opportunity to talk to my informants. After our first few sessions of gossip, I revealed to them my identity and my objectives for coming to play with them. Surprisingly, most of my informants became very excited that they were part of a – in one respondent's words – "cool football research project" (Shaizyan, 19, Malay, Vocational Institute student). Most had a lot to say about mundane practices and matters (cf Hitchings 2012) but some found it difficult to discuss contentious issues such as ethnicity and friendship (see section 3.4). I made a conscious decision to keep my talks informal and light-hearted. I did not attempt to structure my interviews or record any of our conversations on tape as I felt that this would taint the authenticity of the data that I was gathering. I however manually recorded excerpts of our conversations in a notebook. This was so that the authenticity of the data was protected (Longhurst 2003). I also decided against naming any of my informants[5] as some of them were worried that their candid revelations about some of the contentious issues surrounding race[6] and friendship would land them in trouble. Overall, I accumulated at least 18 hours of play with each of my selected teams and approximately ten talk sessions in each site. In each site, four of these talk sessions were longer talk sessions lasting on average for an hour. These were hardly exclusive and my informants and I were often joined by the other

[5] All of my informants' names depicted in this thesis are pseudonyms.

[6] Sedition Act (Chapter 290) Section 3.1.e: any act, speech, words, publication or other thing qualifies such act, speech, words, publication or other thing as one having a seditious tendency; a tendency to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes of the population of Singapore. http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p;page=0;query=DocId%3A%221f6d9e4b-1cf1-4575-9480-da4bdeff9ef4%22%20Status%3Apublished%20Depth%3A0;rec=0

users present. The other six talk sessions were more fleeting yet intimate talk sessions between fewer, and sometimes just one, informant. These occurred mostly between games and the information shared during these sessions was usually more intimate.

3.3.2 Open fields

Access to the open fields is easy compared to the street football court. You simply turn up ready to play. I first chanced upon the opportunity to play football with others in the open field at Tanjong Rhu View when I went cross-country cycling with two of my friends. We cycled past, saw people playing and asked to join in. I was told that apart from a few of the guys who came here regularly, the rest were often spontaneous inclusions like my friends and me on that day. I have since been playing regularly at Tanjong Rhu View. My repeated presence at these sites enabled me to create rapport with the few who play at these sites on a regular basis. I acquired their contacts and we arranged to play on a regular basis.

Compared to street football, open field football features relatively fewer stoppages. However, after the games end, some of the players sit around with drinks and cigarettes and talk about random issues that run the gamut from interesting moments in that evening's play session to football in general. These chat sessions were an opportune moment for me to access my informants' thoughts and experiences on playing open field football and footballing culture in Singapore. Upon revealing my identity and objectives of the research, most of the players were similarly excited about the prospect of someone doing formal research on what they considered to be an important part of their lives – recreational football – and were more than enthusiastic in sharing their views. The level of candour and intimate detail in the responses of the informants in these sites were generally much higher than those in the street football courts. This could be due to the open and non-committal nature of relations between these 'strangers', and could also be due to the demographic of these informants – the adults who

frequently played in the field were more forthcoming and reflexive about their sentiments. While most of them were not against being named, I decided against this to maintain the consistency in my research method. Similarly, I recorded excerpts of our conversations in a notebook to ensure that their responses are accurately portrayed in this thesis. Overall, I managed at least 12 hours of game time and 4 talk sessions in each of the open fields. Fewer hours of game time and fewer talk sessions were required in the open fields as it was easier to gather informative data from the informants in these sites.

3.4 Ethical dilemmas: the (non)wary respondent

In many cases, researchers find that potential informants are reluctant to talk. This reluctance is manifest in two ways – reluctance to grant access to the researcher and reluctance to talk about certain issues which they may find sensitive or potentially self-harming. On the flipside, there are informants who are overzealous in wanting to speak with researchers (Holstein and Gubrium 2003). In this section, I show how I have had to grapple with ethical dilemmas that arise from my practical responses to reluctant and overzealous respondents.

Because of my positionality as a Chinese researcher, most of my Malay informants were particularly reserved in responding to issues surrounding ethnicity. As such, my initial responses from this group of respondents were largely contrived and therefore somewhat insignificant to the research endeavour. In order to persuade these informants to talk more freely, I had to exercise skills in 'doing rapport' with – or rather to – them (Duncombe and Jessop 2002). In trying to simulate empathy with my informants, I participate as an 'insider' in their microculture, where the minimal social distance offers the basis for more intimate and authentic responses (Hochschild 1983). Rather than "trying to expunge the personality of the interviewer and to standardize interviews, this [more personalized] approach demands that interviewers should manage their appearance, behaviour and self-presentation…. to build

rapport and trust with [respondents]" (O'Connell Davidson and Layder 1994: 122-123). In my case, this entailed learning popular football speak in Bahasa Melayu, ensuring that I knew and respected the 'rules' of the court and playing hard for the teams I played for.

Inasmuch as 'doing rapport' is practically useful for the interviewer, it presents ethical dilemmas to be considered. First, by 'doing rapport' the interviewer sets the terms and agenda of the encounter and in effect manages the consent of the interviewee (Duncombe and Jessop 2002). This may work to circumscribe opportunities for the interviewee to challenge part or the whole of the interview process because doing so would be tantamount to breaching the rapport created. Under these circumstances, 'doing rapport' functions as the ethically questionable subterfuge for more open negotiation of the interviewee's fully informed consent to participate in the research process (see Birch and Miller 2002). Second, with deeper rapport, informants become more inclined to explore more intimate practices and interpretations. In so doing, they are more likely to disclose experiences and feelings which, upon reflection, they would have preferred to keep private from others (Stacey 1988), or not to acknowledge even to themselves. Interviewers thus run the risk of breaching interviewees' rights not to amplify their own innermost thoughts (Duncombe and Marsden 1996). This was apparent in my research and I had to balance between gathering productive information and mitigating my informants' feelings of discontent within the football courts from spiralling into wider feelings of disgruntlement surrounding issues of ethnicity in Singapore, or translating into actual altercations and fights. I also had to play the role of gatekeeper where I assured my informants that very private issues discussed were strictly off the record.

Conversely, I faced non-wary respondents – specifically what Dean et al (1967) term 'frustrated' informants. These are informants who leverage interviews to vent their malcontent about their positions or the ill treatment they are receiving. Because of my positionality and the rapport created with my Chinese informants, for example, they are often

unabashed in detailing explicitly their experiences in footballing spaces. A group of Chinese classmates from a nearby Secondary School referred to an incident that happened at Bukit Batok Central football court that they used to frequent:

> They (Malays) were eyeing our stuff the moment we put them down (in the stands). We had a good run in the court and after we ended, two of our phones were missing from our bags. Who else could it be but those mats[7]? No use confronting them, we were outnumbered. Good for nothing, only know how to steal things.

These informants then went on an expletive laden tirade on the Malays in general. This presented an ethical dilemma for me. As will be shown in chapter five, isolated incidents like these happen sporadically in the street football court but can hardly be taken to be emblematic of the behaviour of a particular ethnicity (cf Amin and Parkinson 2002). Yet, as a Chinese footballer, I have myself experienced numerous negative encounters with Malay footballers that include violence, racist exchanges and theft. Taylor (2011: 15) notes that insiderness – an intimate knowledge of and experience in a field – makes "objectivity incredibly difficult and leaves very little room for analytic distance". Indeed, it was extremely tempting for me to corroborate my informants' tirades with my own experiences. While the positionality of the researcher is important in the co-production of knowledge with informants, the "process of personal distancing…. is required to bring clarity to the research endeavour" (Labaree 2002: 108). This necessitated on my part a long period of self-objectification – to see 'inside' my own cultures, biases and practices to ensure that these did not addle my interpretations of my informants' responses and equally significantly, that these did not serve to stoke blind sentiments of malcontent. Cases of theft, racism and violence in footballing spaces occur

[7] 'Mats' is a derogatory term used to describe aberrant Malays. It is usually used by other races and not by Malays themselves.

sporadically yet these cannot be ruled as an ethnic problem. Further, the onus was on me to guide my informants to make connections between their experiences and the relevant issues that my research had set out to pursue (K'Meyer and Crothers 2007).

The research context presented in this thesis shifts on an everyday basis. Realistically, it is almost impossible to implement a systematic and exhaustive response to the ethical dilemmas mentioned in this section. Nevertheless, I have sought to think ethically and reflexively about my methodological underpinnings and the methods employed so as to minimize the amount of harm to my informants and to ensure that they are suitably engaged in the co-production of knowledge.

4. THE OPEN FIELD: THE LUDIC CITY EPITOMIZED?

4.1 Overview

This chapter investigates the politics of co-existence in the open field. This is done through mapping the relationship between the apparent lack of boundaries, the friendships that maintain and manipulate these boundaries and the resultant possibilities of play and their enchantments. The open field is unlike the street football court. Spatially expansive and without any facilities for 'hanging out', it does not invite territorial contestation. As well, because of the variegated make-up of users on any given day, the nature of friendships that result in the field is a unique one – frivolous, fleeting, egalitarian yet intensely intimate. This enables the open field to function as the safe haven its users regard it to be, allowing for an enchanting experience of play that is spontaneous, vertiginous and non-instrumental. I end the chapter by suggesting that the ludic city be analyzed in relation to a) less explored spaces in the city; b) the geographies of friendship in these spaces and c) the everyday worlds of urban inhabitants.

4.2 The open field

Gap sites – open spaces which are not designated for any current use – have received surprisingly little attention in design and geographical research and merit more scrutiny (Gehl 2011). Despite Singapore's reputation as a land scarce city-state with few unplanned areas, there remain gap sites pockmarked around the island. Among these are open fields surrounding residential estates. Various scholars (see Trancik 1986) have lamented the lack of community use of these spaces, citing this as the reason as to why such spaces have fallen into disrepair. In Singapore, however, there is a general cognizance on the part of the state and its residents that gap sites provide opportunities for public engagement, in particular for activities such as informal socializing and play (cf Stevens and Ambler 2010).

In mid-2014, the Singapore Land Authority made available open fields within the city for public use (see plate 5.1). Three fields were made available with immediate effect, with dozens of others undergoing minor renovations such as the creation of proper access and levelling of the playfield to make these spaces suitable for public use. To date, there are 282 plots of vacant state land that have been made available for free public use, with no reservations required. The use of these fields is in lieu of future development but this has indeed been a laudable attempt by the state to create more play spaces[8].

Plate 4.1 The open field @ Tanjong Rhu (Photograph by author)

4.3 No boundaries?

The open field is a wide expanse of grass that can fit many people at once. In my observations in the selected field sites, I have witnessed more than fifty users at once in three separate games of football. The expanse of space available in a facility is important because it minimizes the tendency for it to be rendered a contestable territory. In my time playing in the

[8] http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/govt-open-more-play-fields-community-use

fields, I witnessed a unique series of everyday encounters characterized by a lack of boundaries.

The following excerpt represents a common occurrence in the open field:

> Children are playing Cricket and Frisbee at the side of the field. In the middle, where the grass is verdant, two pick-up football games are concurrently ongoing. People of all ethnicities, shapes and ages join in the football game (and leave at will). Some happen to be passers-by (such as joggers in the area) but others have obviously (judging by their dress) turned up to play. Those who have just joined are placed into a team based on the colour of their tops. Today, it is black and white versus all other colours. The goals are made up by placing slippers and bags approximately three metres apart to mark out either side of the 'post'. The game has a competitive edge to it but no dirty play is involved. Nobody is keeping score anyway. Some of the players play at a walking pace, talking and laughing with both teammates and opponents, even when they are on the ball. One player tries to dribble the entire opposition and trips as he shoots, resulting in raucous laughter. One of his teammates playfully slides into him as 'punishment', only to elicit even more laughter. Both players high-five one another. Some of the players sit themselves out due to fatigue and the teams are automatically rearranged to be fair. Those who sit out watch the game from the side and some eventually head to join in the other football game happening across the field.

The above observation contrasts starkly with that in the street football court. In Lefebvre's (1996) terms, boundaries are shaped by a complex relation of ethnicity and friendship. The

context of the open field, however, suggests that these boundaries are absent. This is very much similar to Lefebvre's (1996) ideal of enfranchisement based on the principle of inhabitance:

> This field is public property. Whoever wants to play, plays. All you have to do is turn up. That's the way it has been for some years now. We get the occasional idiot who causes trouble, but by and large everyone is just *here to play* [emphasis added] (Louis, 34, Chinese, Civil Servant).

> [There is] no need to fight [over space]. More than enough. Sometimes we even join two games together if there not enough people because we don't want to run so much (Jaly, 32, Indian, entrepreneur).

Unlike the street football court, the open field is not particularly conducive as a 'home away from home' (Lyman and Scott 1967). There is no material enclosure to demarcate an inside and outside and it does not boast any proper facilities for sitting and 'hanging out' before and after football. In my observations, most of the players that play here leave after playing and congregate for a post-game drink in their own small groups at nearby coffeeshops. Hardly anyone actually stays on the field for a chat after the game. This is also to do with the fact that there is no lighting available in these spaces. As such, there is no visible trace of a territorial sense of place enacted by users of the open field. If anything, the collective sense of place is dissipated into the multiple spaces surrounding the field itself.

4.4 Friendship and (the dissolution of) boundaries

That the open field is characterized by the lack of boundaries does not automatically make it 'accessible' to all. Urban scholars leveraging Simmel's (1950) long-standing concern with the social elements of public space reflect on the publicness of a space as a function of "the

variety of ways in which access is restricted and by whom, or by what forces and in whose interests restrictions are established, maintained and challenged (Parkinson 2013: 683). Chapter four has evaluated the politics of access to the street football court through foregrounding the characteristics and practices of friendship and these must again be foregrounded here. It is through foregrounding the friendships that form within the open field that the possibilities of play can be unraveled. To this end, three aspects of friendship are significant.

First, the friendships between users of the open field are both frivolous and fleeting. Users of the open field only turn up and attempt to create connections with other users when they require an immediate physiological and social goal – to play football. Ahn's (2011: 300) study of friendship between children where the affirmation of friendship between two children has "less to do with making affective bonds than…. with strategic attempts to recruit playmates" is apt here. For those who wish to join in, they are required to make explicit their intentions to those already playing. For those already playing, they are more than happy to make that connection. This is, as shared by one informant, a matter of garnering numbers:

> Sometimes we shout out to cyclists and joggers to join us because we don't have enough to make a good game of it (Luqman, 34, Chinese Muslim, Civil Servant).

The connections actively made between users are purely for instrumental purposes. Affective goals, if any at all, are often cast aside once the instrumental goal – to play football – is arrived at. In fact, I observed that most of these users did not even bother to find out or remember the names of the people they are playing with. This is surprising because a game of football requires a significant amount of communication for it to be played effectively:

> We're just here to play. Not so competitive. Probably won't see them on a regular basis, if ever again so don't really need to know [each other's'] names. [Calling out] 'bro' can already (Randy Ow, 22, Chinese, Undergraduate).

Little effort is made between users of the field to get to know one another on a deeper level. In fact, keeping relationships frivolous is deemed to be a good thing for the users of the field. Limiting the scope of knowledge of and involvement with others allows users to escape from their normal social persona and simply get on with the game without having to wrestle with the burden of performing the ritual of making friends:

> I'm here just to play. If I spend all my time playing nice and asking about their jobs, lives and families as you would in any other context, I won't have time to play. I won't remember all the details anyway (Randy Ow, 22, Chinese, Undergraduate).

The 'conventional' act of making friends and getting to know someone better is deemed to be an impediment to the instrumental goal – playing football – that users of the open field seek. This is very much unlike the context of the street football court, where affection and reciprocity feature centrally in enabling meaningful access to playing football.

Second, such fleeting and frivolous relationships also mean that these friendships are entered into on an egalitarian basis. Parties not only voluntarily enter the relationship but are free to interact on openly negotiated and hence more equitable terms. The dissolution of norms and categories leads to a levelling of status between different users. The interactions between these users go through "an ambivalent social phase of limbo" (Spariosu 1997: 33), where they are set free of any social, economic and cultural coordinates and are thus treated as faceless players in a game rather than through the different social categories such as ethnicity which

they inevitably embody. Because individual goals such as winning to stake a claim to the space (chapter four) are unknown and undefined, the common purpose of merely being with and experiencing other people in a game of football becomes an end in itself (Lennard and Lennard 1984). Where in the street football court ethnicity features in determining one's access to the space and one's terms of play, the users of the field have adroitly come up with a collective identity with credit to one of the more regular players:

> We call him Broski. He is always going around 'bro-ing' people trying to make them feel at home. He has a good way of organizing the play… such as numbering players (Mark Li, 33, Chinese, IT Manager).

The notion of 'brotherhood' is not insignificant. In the open field, access is made real by acting on the principles of brotherhood in the field:

> Being brothers on the field is not that hard. One, enjoy the game. Even you don't like it, make good of it. Two, just enjoy the time around others. Don't be a spoilsport (Chin Song, 31, Chinese, Technical Specialist – Singapore Air Force).

The games that occur on the field shift between variants of football and comprise different groups of people on different days. When users embrace both the game of the moment and the people around them, they realize access through these affirmative actions. Unlike the street football court, where access is made real through a strictly enforced set of obligations to the end of performing ethnicity, access to the field is one that can be realized via the all-encompassing notion of 'having fun', irrespective of social identity. I observed in my time playing at the fields that users came from all walks of life, ethnicities, ages and gender. One of the informants, a young adult Malay male shared a poignant reflection with me:

> Whenever I play here, the guys always joke with me, telling me to be a bro and not an abang[9]. The girls who play here, we also call them bro. I'm happy to be a bro here. It's much easier than being one in the street football court. Sometimes being Malay is not a good thing, it's tough to live up to expectations [of other Malay friends] and others [other races] think you are violent [when playing football] (Muhd Fuazi, 28, Malay, Customer Service Manager).

One's social identity can become burden, especially in the context of social interaction. The freedom that users get from their social identity allows them to singularly express their individuality as a 'bro'. Those that they interact with are then less likely to conflate their social identity with the respective stigmas (such as violent tendencies when playing football) that have been developed over time. This means that they are less likely to be treated instrumentally and more likely to be treated equally (Lennard and Lennard 1984). This allows users of the open field to enjoy football as an end in itself and not have to negotiate their social identities which would, if left un-negotiated, taint their playful experience within. The discourse and practice of brotherhood in this context is one that refers to a light-hearted friendship which serves more as an inclusive and equalizing tendency than an emotional bond or obligation between users by virtue of kinship.

Third, the friendship between users of the field is often characterized by bouts of intense sensations and intimacy. This intimacy is not the same as the "joyful and permanent bonding" which Hoopes (1987) suggests, one which brings with it commitment and obligations. Rather, it is precisely due to the fleeting, frivolous and egalitarian nature of the friendship between users in the open field that allows for serendipitous bouts of intimacy. Because individuals are

[9] 'Abang' is Bahasa Melayu for 'brother'. In this context, it also insinuates that Malays display violent tendencies during football (as shown in Chapter four).

free from the need to ensure some form of social propriety connected with their status, they are able to fantasize about acting improperly with others and express this "in rebellion against every type of [social] code, rule and organization" (Caillois 1961: 157). Consider this occurrence, for example:

> Playing here…. there was once we sandwiched one girl between two guys to celebrate a goal she scored. She wasn't complaining! Celebrations can get pretty crazy here. Once, one of the guys stripped and ran about after he scored. It was hilarious. We also make fun of the Malays that come here, that they are too lousy to play in their own neighbourhood, but those [Malays] who come here can take a joke (Chan Wee, 29, Chinese, Educator).

Under normal circumstances, intimate contact between genders (in public no less), stripping in front of many others and opening deriding a member of another race are acts that are generally seen as morally dubious, acts that may only be condoned if some measure of intimacy is shared between the relevant parties. Yet, in the context of the open field, these are common occurrences. It is therefore feasible to posit that the users of the open field are not only open but amenable to sharing bouts of intimacy that transgress moral reason. Through the actualization of these fantasies, they seek to experience a sense of release from social responsibilities and pressures (Caillois 1961):

> We come to play football, but also to do stupid things. It all adds to the fun. Even better that everyone is up for it. It is a good release for us (LSY, 33, Chinese, IT Manager).

That users of the open field are neither socially nor morally obligated to one another allows them to leverage their friendships to engage in 'forbidden pleasures' – actions that would be deemed as inappropriate if one were to be playing the role which has been defined for him/herself by work and domestic life (Stevens 2007). Such intimacy is conceptualized by

Thrift (2005) as a 'light-touch' model of intimacy, where users extract the benefits of intense intimate relations from one another without having to fulfill any substantive responsibilities. By allowing for "the arousal, exposure and satiation of forbidden desires, it helps people to more fully be themselves" (Stevens 2007: 43).

4.5 Play and enchantment in the open field

What do the micro-politics in the open field tell us about play and its enchantments? First, playing here is taken as an ephemeral moment of refuge by its users, where their everyday lives are temporarily suspended and they are taken into an extraordinary state of being (cf Schneider, 1993). Conversations with the users of the open field reveal that their decision to play at the field on any given day is often a "spontaneous, last-minute decision" (Kenyi Wang, 34, Chinese, Real Estate Director). That is, most of these users do not plan ahead to go down to play at either of the fields I frequented[10]. The play that users engage in here is therefore to them diametric to long-term purposes, productive work and serious consequences (Goodale and Godbey 1988). As one user, who has to travel around the island to meet clients for work puts it:

> I always leave some gear at the back of my car. Sometimes my clients cancel on me and I get some bonus free time, so I come here to let off some steam [from work] (Kenyi Wang, 34, Chinese, Real Estate Director).

Some users even juxtaposed playing football in the open field with other football-related pursuits:

> We play in a very competitive league. There is always a need to be focused and productive to get the job done [i.e. to win games]. When our games are

[10] This is not to detract from the fact that there remain small groups of friends who play at these fields on a semi-regular and pre-meditated basis. Most of these are young children (aged 10-16) who live in the private neighbourhoods encompassing the play fields.

> cancelled a few of us come here together just to play some recreational football and chill out (Ken Pang, 32, Chinese, Entrepreneur).

The non-instrumentality of play in the open field is thus contrasted to pursuits such as work and even competitive play, pursuits that require consistent, practical and calculated behaviour (Stevens 2007). The unique possibilities of play in the open field becomes a domain of sporadic freedom of physical, mental and social expression free from the compulsion of the tedium and expectations in everyday instrumental activities (Gilloch 1996). It is a moment that is never pre-meditated, and one that derives its enchantments from this serendipitous quality.

Second, where enchantment is a social experience, the act of playing with strangers here opens up endless possibilities for sociality. The fleeting and non-obligatory nature of such friendships as well as the fact that individuals are biographically unknown to one another leads users to not only pursue but be more open to connections with others in the open field. Following Lofland (1998), sociality in public spaces can take on two forms: aesthetic and interactional. Aesthetic sociality implies the freedom of individuals to have their presence 'ignored' by those around them. This is best exemplified by the phenomenon of 'people watching' (see Lyle 1970). A group of users whom I approached while they were sitting at the side watching the game of football reveal that they were more than happy to just sit down, relax, chat amongst themselves and "cheer when a goal is scored or laugh when people fall down" (Yu Hang, 27, Chinese, Female, Auditor). The opportunity for bystanders to 'join in the play' through spectating is significant as a playful pleasure in itself, but more so because the presence of an audience augments the experience of the play that is ongoing on the field (Lutfiyya 1987).

This leads to the notion of interactional sociality, which refers to the variegated possibilities of the connections that they make with others in the open field. Play in the open field, as I

observed on many occasions, encourages bystanders to join in (such as those who are watching or jogging by), engendering a more complex network of sociality. When people have unexpected encounters with others, they are less inclined to follow predetermined rules of conduct because they are biographically unknown to one another. This coupled with the fact that they are more amenable to "explore options, to establish new meanings and new correspondences" in their play (Stevens 2007: 51). In my time at the field, I participated in very unique variations of football. I present two indelible ones here:

> A group of girls watching by the side are asked to join in by the guys playing in the field. One of the guys suggested cheekily that each girl should hold hands with a guy throughout the game and unsurprisingly, most of the guys supported the notion. The girls seemed quite game so the match proceeded as such. It really wasn't football as much as it was a university orientation ice-breaker. There was raucous laughter, embarrassing moments and physically intimate celebrations (such as carrying the girls and kissing them on the cheek when they scored) all around.

> Some parents who brought their children to play in the field eventually joined a group of teenagers and young adults. The rule was simple, only the older participants (the parents) were allowed to score. The game proceeded like a game of American Football, where the teenagers wrestled to block each other off so that the older participants – who were mostly incapable of creating goalscoring opportunities by themselves against the much quicker and stronger teenagers – could score. It was an interesting sight of playful roughhousing amongst the teenagers; a heartwarming moment where participants of all ages enjoyed a game together.

The above accounts show how 'conventional' games of pick-up football in the open field are often interspersed with novel forms of play that less resembles football than other forms of playful sociality. Lefebvre's conception of 'moments' in everyday social space is pertinent here, where "when playing, one accepts the rules of the game and each time recreates and reinvents the usage of the game" (Kofman and Lebas 1996: 30). Users of the field, who arrive with the intention of playing football are often – under the guise of football – enlisted into new and unexpected ways of connecting with others, both through practice and emotionally. The enchantments derived from play in the open field can thus be taken as multiplex experiences of pure sociality unperturbed by the constraints of everyday life, where dichotomous elements of life which are ordinarily not combinable are brought together (Lyman and Scott 1975).

Third, play in the open field is a corporeally and morally vertiginous. I established at the beginning of this section that users appropriate the open field as a refuge from the tedium and pressures of work and competitive play. Juxtaposed against the routine, mundane and calculated rhythms which underpin the everyday lives of my respondents, the act of playing football in the open field is a means through which they escape normal bodily and mental experience and self-control (Stevens 2007). Physical sensations are brought about by challenging the limits of physiological ability against the uncontrolled environment in which the body plays. As one user who is an experienced footballer playing in a competitive league puts it:

> When I come here (the open field) to play, I like to adopt a siege mentality. I try to exceed myself by perfecting my dribbling skills and using tricks to get past opponents. I like that my opponents are always different and that I don't know how [violently] they will react against my dribbling. I got a bad tackle once here, it wasn't intentional, but I guess it's part of the challenge. I

> come back whenever my league game is cancelled (Ken Pang, 32, Chinese, Entrepreneur).

Players who come looking for a corporeal challenge do so through "mad, tremendous and convulsive movements" (Caillois 1961: 25) such as turning sharply, sprinting, jumping over tackles and attempting tricks that they would not normally attempt in a competitive match. Such experiences of vertigo are pleasurable not only because they allow one to transcend the limits of their bodily practice but because they enable the transcendence of these limits within a safe space. As my chat with the above informant reveals:

> I practice my tricks and dribbling here not only because the players are generally lousier, but because they won't [set out to] injure me. If I tried the same things in a league game, the opponents would break my legs. [I've seen it] happen before (Ken Pang, 32, Chinese, Entrepreneur).

The surrender to disorderly bodily practice thus cannot be total, because the danger lies "in not being able to end the disorder that has been accepted" (ibid: 78). As instantiated in the perennial return of such players to the open field, the enchantments of play as corporeal vertigo thus comes from the attempted mastery of one's bodily faculties over the potential danger that accrues from the pushing of one's body over its limits as well as well the danger from their engagement with the unpredictable and sometimes inadvertently violent nature of play in the open field. The frivolous nature of the friendships shared amongst users of the open field is significant here in two ways. First, playing competitive football with a team of friends would mean that individual players have to display traits such as teamwork and follow strictly the tactics set out by the captains or otherwise be regarded as a lousy friend and lousy teammate. Second, the lack of a relationship between users in the field means that enmities

are not developed, as compared to players in a competitive league who clash on a regular basis. This means that deliberate acts of violence to cause injury are minimized.

Users of the open field also leverage on play as a morally vertiginous activity. Chats with my informants reveal that many of them hold high positions in society; they are at work professionals, managers, and elites and therefore obliged to assume a certain level of moral and corporate professionalism. One user contrasts his play sessions in the open field with the company-organized play sessions in which he is frequent participant:

> All these company-organized play sessions are done with the objective of team bonding. Often though, I consider these sessions more of a 'charade' because everyone is trying to assume the persona of a good and morally upright executive – contriving to display traits such as sportsmanship, decorum and teamwork. While this is definitely not a bad thing, it certainly takes away the spontaneity of play and becomes an extension of workplace relations. The sessions here [at the open field] are where we can be ourselves because no one is obliged to fulfill certain traits (Leon Wang, 34, Assistant Director).

From the above account, the nature of relationships between individuals in everyday life is significant in constraining the nature of play. Play under such circumstances is leveraged by individuals as a process to inculcate and reproduce social habitus which is deemed to be appropriate of or even beneficial to one's social standing in the social order (Stevens 2007). This means that playing in corporate-organized settings and even the setting of competitive league football is seen as an extension of professional and corporate relations. Play in the open field takes on a drastically different nature. I have above shared my observations on the raucous nature of play that goes on in the open field. Football, seen this way, is often a

subterfuge for play that comprises brash action, making loud noises, roughhousing and close physical contact with strangers. Such actions, which would under the circumstances of everyday life be considered improper, are opportunities for users of the open field to "toy with violence and tease repressed passions" (Darnton 1984: 101). Because the lack of a proper moral code in the context means that the risk of 'professional' individuals flouting the behavioural boundaries expected of them, together with the willingness of strangers to themselves abdicate moral propriety, individuals are able not only to be "caught up and carried away" on playful relations but act on them (cf Bennett 2001: 5). Therefore, play in the open field presents an opportunity for its users to express their individual agencies as emancipation from the "burden of…. social responsibilities and pressures" (Caillois 1961: 44). Play in this context is free from any instrumental objective or benefit; it embraces risk for its own sake and for the affirmation of human bodily and mental experience. By allowing for the arousal, exposure and satiation of forbidden experiences, it allows people to become enchanted – exploring more fully their identities (Stevens 2007).

4.6 Enchantment and the ludic city

As mentioned in chapter two, the ludic city represents the aspiration of urban scholars to understand how enchanting encounters can be created by and for urban inhabitants through playful action. This chapter has unraveled a series of everyday playful encounters that correspond very closely to the ideal of the ludic city. Enchantment is demonstrated to be many things: an extraordinary corporeal, mental and social experience; a temporary and serendipitous release from the pressures of societal obligations; the dissolution of boundaries leading to egalitarian engagements and non-instrumentality. It is therefore important to conclude this chapter by outlining a research agenda that is concerned with how this 'ideal' situation is arrived at and how these situations relate to everyday life.

First, this chapter foregrounds the significance of gap sites in the realization of enchanting encounters. While it cannot be reduced to such, the open field – in its underdetermined form – forms the basis of the encounters that come to be assembled in its space. Watson (2006; 2009) notes that much of urban scholarship on public space and urban encounters have tended to focus on monumental spaces such as public squares, shopping malls and city plazas. In corollary, this is accompanied by pessimistic accounts on the decay of publicness in spaces which are leftover, undetermined and unknown. Inasmuch as planners strive to craft the perfect neighbourhood for urban inhabitants, this chapter has emphasized the utility of considering less explored spaces such as the open fields in between residential buildings. It has shown first, that what might be seen as spaces lost to disrepair or ambiguity are in fact great repositories for conceptualizing playful encounter; and second, that these contradict pessimistic accounts of the decline of social association in the city.

Second, this paper has asserted the importance of friendship as a means to conceptualize the politics of co-existence in play spaces. While the open field offers the opportunity for ludic encounters, it is the friendships that are created in the field that manipulate (or dissolve) the boundaries which culminate in a functional yet ludic community of strangers (Amin 2002). In analyzing the series of encounters in the open field through the geographies of social encounter – and more specifically friendships – this thesis shows that friendship as an academic pursuit has much to do with analyses on urban ideals and the encounters that constitute these. Friendships are forged, sustained and dissolved in and through networks, while also variously opening and foreclosing human spatial possibilities (Bunnell et al 2012: 503).

Conversely, this thesis also challenges conventional notions of friendship – dyadic, long-term relations underpinned by mutual obligation and affection (Zelizer 2005). It underscores the prevalence and significance of fleeting and frivolous relations underpinned by intense and

serendipitous bouts of intimacy in making spaces of refuge, enjoyment and escape. This is particularly useful in cities characterized by rationality, obligation and mundane routine.

How then does the ludic city feature in the everyday lives of urban inhabitants? Following Lefebvre's (1996) use of the term *oeuvre*, everyday living is work, in which the instrumental organization of everyday life is a necessary condition for the optimal fulfillment of social, political economic and cultural needs. I have shown in the previous section that play in the open field is regarded by its users as a sanctuary from everyday life. To add nuance to this argument, users do not actually desire a permanent escape from their everyday lives. When asked why they do not play in the open field on a regular basis, one user opined:

> Playing in the open field is only great because of its rarity. We have no intention to give up our everyday lives; work, family and competitive football form the basis of our lives. Play here is much like a bonus… an addition [to our lives]. [If we were to] play here every day it wouldn't be this charming anymore. It would be a waste of time (Gab Kit, 37, Thai-Chinese, Entrepreneur).

Most urban inhabitants are cognizant and accepting of their roles and aspirations in society, and are more than happy to work rationally towards the eventual fulfillment of these goals. Users of the open field acknowledge the play as occasions of "pure waste: [a] waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill and often money" (Caillois 1961: 5). Play here, then, is only significant when it does not directly detract from primary goals in life such as, as revealed by my informants – becoming richer, better at football and spending more time with family and friends. Play is only enchanting when it acts as a supplement to the already fulfilling lives of most of the users of the open field. The ludic city is thus not to be conceived as "a voluntary

departure from the mundane world of involuntary routinization" (Lyman and Scott 1975: 174) but as an embellishment to the already fulfilling lives of urban inhabitants.

Invoking Lefebvre's (1996) concept of the *oeuvre* again, everyday life is about combining productive and non-productive acts. Non-productive acts "allow the organism a measure of leeway for taking initiatives (these being neither determined nor arbitrary) (Lefebvre 1991: 176). That is, the use of surplus energies to indulge in non-productive play is a gratuitous choice, one made in the wider context of everyday life. This allows urban inhabitants to move in and out of the rationality of everyday living at will, allowing them to explore more holistically their rationalities, abilities and fantasies in tandem. In short, such play refreshes the inhabitant and allows him/ her to become more fulfilled and therefore more productive in other spheres such as work and family. It can be argued then that the ludic city might not be construed as an antithesis to everyday living, but that these liminal moments of release are necessary for the stable reproduction of wider society (Bakhtin 1984).

5. THE STREET FOOTBALL COURT: THE LUDIC CITY EXTENDED?

5.1 Overview

This chapter investigates the politics of co-existence in street football courts. This is done through mapping the relationship between the boundaries created, the friendships that maintain and manipulate these boundaries and the resultant possibilities of play and their enchantments. I argue first, that the limited space of the court invites contestation between its users. Second, I show how boundaries are created discursively – expressed in an ethnic cleavage – and materially – expressed in the perimeter of the court. Third, I show how friendships feature as a utilitarian and affective tool in manipulating these boundaries. Fourth, I show how these result in ludic encounters which largely benefit the Malays – the principal inhabitants of the court – but also some Chinese teams. To end, I show how while the findings in this chapter seem to contradict those in chapter four and therefore the idealized characteristics of the ludic city, this helps to extend our conceptions of what the ludic city actually entails on the ground.

5.2 The street football court

The street football court is a ubiquitous fixture in Singapore's public housing landscape (see Plate 5.1). These are part of a wide variety of purposefully built recreational facilities such as playgrounds, fitness corners and pavilions in neighbourhood precincts, an endeavor by the Housing Development Board to provide a focal point for recreation in each estate (see Yuen 1995). Courts assume the same form in all neighbourhoods. The play area, encompassed by a concrete wall, measures approximately 25m long and 15m wide. Outside the play area, there are in some courts seating areas in the form of a grandstand. This area is a place for players and spectators to sit, to leave their belongings and to engage in ancillary activities like eating

and playing cards. The court is further encased in a cage or net to prevent errant footballs from hitting passers-by.

Plate 5.1 Street football courts in Singapore (Photographs by author)

Legally, the street football court is a public space that is accessible to anyone. Yet our observations make apparent that the terms of access are linked to the negotiations and contestations between its users. The nature of these relations is a means through which membership to the court and the terms and concomitantly the experience of play are determined. As a limited space, the street football court is a much sought after space. The court can only accommodate two teams of five at any one time. Ideally, this space could accommodate to different groups playing together, facilitated by agreements between groups on the duration of play, as Lai (2011) suggests in her ethnographic work on everyday living in Singapore's public housing estates. In our observations, however, such a mechanism of 'sharing' is hardly determined by time, if sharing is concurred upon at all. Rather, the 'shared' use of the court is often determined by a contest where the first team to score a set number of goals (usually two) wins the game and stays on the court to face the next challenger. The losing team joins the back of the queue, which can mean up to an hour's waiting time during peak periods. To the users of the court, the pursuit of play time and space is a serious one,

earned by winning games to stay in the court and therefore 'owning' the place. As an informant put:

> It is very competitive. Sometimes there are ten teams [outside the court] waiting. If you want to play more, you have to win. It's not just about winning; it's about owning the court (Brandon, 27, Indian Muslim).

That the opportunities for play in the court are so limited makes it a place to be conquered and 'owned', for those who 'own' the court place in themselves the power the determine what happens within, how it happens and with whom it happens (Blommaert et al 2005). This will be drawn out in more detail in the next section.

5.3 Creating boundaries

In this section, I show how the principal inhabitants of the court – a few groups of Malay users who play there almost every day – create boundaries that seek to control the terms of play through discursive and material means. The following observation – a common occurrence in the court – is an important backdrop to understand why and how these principal inhabitants create these boundaries:

> Two Malay teams are playing in the court. Both teams remain very organized in their movement, without being overly competitive. After about fifteen minutes, one of the teams finally scores the two goals needed to knock out their opponents. The game ends cordially, with high-fives and laughter all around. A Chinese team who has been waiting for a while now enters the court next. The complexion of the game changes abruptly. The champion[11] Malay team has suddenly become very serious, each player barking out instructions to one another. It shortly

[11] 'Champions' are teams who have just won their previous game and therefore earned the right to play another.

> becomes apparent that the Malay team is much better than their Chinese counterpart. The game starts to get very physical; tackles and kicks are flying in at a frenetic pace. One Malay player takes a deliberate swipe at his Chinese opponent, and the latter falls on his backside. He stands up and both stare daggers at each other, while the Malay spectators at the side barrage the Chinese team with expletives and monkey calls. The Chinese team concedes two goals in less than five minutes and leaves the play area to wait their turn, only to decide to leave altogether after another ten minutes.

It is important to first understand why there seems to be an ethnically-charged rivalry underpinning the everyday encounters in the street football court. Speaking with Faizal, a 22-year-old Malay respondent exposed us to his thoughts:

> They [referring to the Chinese] come here so xia lan[12], with team jerseys and matching shoes but they really can't play… very insulting to football siol.

This could be interpreted as animosity between ethnic groups based on class difference. Yet, observations over eight weeks reveal that class is not entirely significant in the divisions evident in the court. First, many of the Malay teams wear team jerseys and matching shoes themselves. Second, some of the Chinese teams who come to play occasionally share a positive relationship with the Malay teams who frequent the court – the significance of which will be explicated in section 4.4. Rather, the contention here is that first, most Chinese players are perceived to be more concerned with conspicuous display of status – wearing expensive team jerseys and footwear – than actually playing football and second, that they are arrogant despite being inferior players.

[12] Xia Lan is an adjective in local dialect. It refers to arrogance.

This misanthropy is down to the fact that football is regarded by my Malay informants as a serious endeavor – not only as a way of life but a career prospect; and street football in particular, is seen as a starting point for further development:

> The national players all started in the courts. Many of our friends who used to play here have gone on to play for the national team at different age group[s]. We always hope to become that standard someday… no need to play for national team… maybe just club level. That's why street soccer is more than just a game for us (Mushin, 25, Malay).

Taken together, the Malay users *perceive* a discrepancy in one, footballing ability and two, the commitment to take the sport as a serious endeavor as well as accord it its due respect between themselves and most of the Chinese users of the court.

This has indeed resulted in an ethnic division – not from a genuine hatred of the 'other' based on the ethnic characteristics but one discursively created to police the boundaries and terms of use of the court:

This is *our* (referring to the Malay users) game and our court [original emphasis]. They (referring to the Chinese) don't deserve to play here. They are wasting our time when they keep coming back. They can always go play basketball or play low-level football at "The Cage"… We take our football seriously here (Fazily Muhd, 22, Malay, Logistics Assistant).

To the Malays, street football is a serious endeavour, one which has to be taken seriously. This conflation of the commitment to football as well as the ability in the sport with the Malay ethnicity is a manoeuvre in which the principal inhabitants of the court can purposefully exclude those whom they deem undeserving of partaking in a (playful) endeavor in which they treat with the highest regard.

The discursive boundaries created are corroborated by a material boundary. In my observations, I noticed that insofar as the courts were filled with Malay users on an everyday basis, many of them vacillate between playing football and engaging in other non-footballing activities - eating, drinking, gossiping, playing the guitar, playing cards and even doing homework at the grandstand encircling the play area. I asked 16-year-old Mus, a Malay secondary school student, why he and his friends would not consider more conducive areas for such activities:

All our friends are here… doing things here got more feel la… This is like my home. We play football inside and do everything else inside here [referring to the grandstand area]. We spend more time here than at home.

A sense of place can be cultivated through routinized activity that takes place over time in a particular place (Relph 1976). The sense of place users develop in the court is constructed viscerally through their mundane practices within the enclosed arena of the court and their interactions with familiar people and the sensory experiences that accrue. This is a strong sense of place that promotes an intimate and emotional connection with the place, one that overlaps with the notion of territoriality based on an inside-outside dichotomy (Harding 2010). The physical enclosure of the court provides a materiality to the discursive boundaries the principal inhabitants of the court create, as well as an actual territory to 'defend' and police. Their bond to a designated territory cause them to deploy and defend their ownership of it, so that they may 'rightfully' control the access to and terms of its use.

5.4 Friendship: maintaining and manipulating boundaries

Insofar as the principal inhabitants of the court create specific boundaries, these are maintained and manipulated by collective action underpinned by notions of friendship. The enactment of particular social outcomes in space must be collectively *worked out* (cf Purcell

2008). In other words, struggling for rights is a *practical* matter, one which requires sustained effort to coordinate the collective attitudes, practices and habits of variegated individuals (Iveson 2014). Friendship, in this case, is not only a practical and instrumental effort to sustain and further the construction of Malay users' 'ownership' of the street football court but a set of obligations upon which Malay users' membership to their community of friends is upheld. According to my informants, the principals of the court who are looked upon as leader figures constantly espouse to their peers the need to stand up collectively against Chinese users through actions like constantly improving one's footballing ability, speaking only in Bahasa Melayu with one another, showing overt signs of support such as heckling opponents when a Malay team is playing against a Chinese team, playing 'hard' (violently) against Chinese teams and standing up together to the Chinese 'troublemakers' in the event of an altercation. These actions are fully expected of *all* Malays who use the court. These were common occurrences observed in my time at the courts.

While individual Malay teams may sometimes consider themselves rivals on a normal day, they are called upon to let these rivalries go and support their friends to the end maintaining the standards and sanctity of street football. According to one informant, Malay users who deviate from these collective actions are quickly ostracized by the majority:

> We must always help our friends and fight for the court. If some of the [Malay] guys don't follow our lead, they are lousy friends. We will kick them out of the court like we kick the Chinese out [referring to playing hard against them so as to restrict their playing time] (N, 27, Malay, Events Associate).

Invoking Bourdieu (1984), friendship in this case serves as a prime site of social monitoring and social control, where Malay users are expected to display the right qualities in order to

retain their membership in the court. It may seem then that friendships between Malay users in the court are dynamically instrumental – where interpersonal relations are voluntarily entered into for the agenda of resisting their Chinese counterparts and similarly dissolved thereafter (Bowlby 2011).

However, the findings show that these friendships are more than ad-hoc relations. Here, affection shares a dialectical relationship with instrumentality (see Mains 2013). Affection here is seen in two ways. One, it is developed through the everyday performance of the idealized notions of friendship. Two, it is through isolated incidents of confrontation and violence where Malay users reinforce their negative impressions of the Chinese as distractions and dangers to the sanctity of the street football court. As one informant puts it:

> We used to follow what the abangs told us to do because we just wanted to be able to play. But the more we play the more we see… Chinese players who don't really come here to play football seriously. There was one time when one of the abangs had to go to hospital because he was beaten up by a Chinese gangster outside the court. We *want to* stand together to prevent such things from happening again [emphasis added]. We want to make sure that we are able to play good football without disturbances (Im, 17, Indian Muslim, Vocational Institute student).

Through these, individual Malay users develop new understandings of their interests in relation to each other and to the broader goal of securing the court and the status of street football. They form affective solidarities that enable them not only to keep these reciprocities going but gain a collective belief for doing so. Sometimes, individual Malay users who are not inclined to perform the abovementioned obligatons of friendship are influenced by their

perceived affection for their peers. Affection between friends in this case becomes an obligation to afford help. As one user shares:

> I don't care much about the Chinese and I don't really want to 'fight' against them. But… my friends helped me before, I can't say no when they ask me to help (Gi, Malay, 17, Junior College student).

This mirrors Hruschka's (2010: 68) definition of friendship as "a social relationship in which partners provide support according to their abilities in times of need, and in which this behaviour is motivated in part by positive affect between [friends]". An informant affirms how the affective ties between peers motivate their actions to protect their space:

> We are friends. If we don't help one another, there won't be a place for us to play as we like. We help because we love one another, and we love one another because we help. We have a home only because… of our friends (Hafiz, 19, Malay, Junior College student).

The findings show that affection is often the driving force behind acts of reciprocity between friends, and it is this reciprocity that leads to the construction and consolidation of affection (see Mains 2013). It is through this dialectical relationship that the boundaries of the street football court are policed by its Malay users. It is also important to note, as shown not only in the above remark but as a theme reverberating across our conversations with our Malay informants, how despite its usage as a driver for instrumental action, affection between Malay peers is also valued in and of itself. It is this collective affection shared between peers that makes the the court worth protecting and fighting over. The space of the court is the material manifestation of the affective friendships shared between its Malay users. It is a space that has been transformed into 'a home away from home' through collective instrumental and affective action (Lyman and Scott 1967).

5.5 Play and enchantment in the street football court

What can the micro-politics witnessed in the street football court tell us about play and its enchantments? First, and most significantly, play is a morally vertiginous activity in the eyes of the Malay users of the court. This is achieved not only through superior footballing ability, but the readiness to engage in excessive physical force. Through the act of playing (violently) to win in the court, Malay users create a sense of identity and morality revolving around their belief that street football should be a serious endeavour:

> We can win them no problem… but we whack[13] because we want to emphasize that street football is a serious thing to us… We want them to fear us and teach them a lesson. Sometimes it [referring to the game of football] really seems more like wrestling than football. But this is not a crime and we like it that way… can whack then shiok[14] what. We do this to fight for our place and our beliefs. We want to make the court a place for serious football (N, 27, Malay, Events Associate).

Winning with excessive force provides them not only with a viable means to get their message across but a physically vertiginous feeling which leaves them satisfied, as well as the feeling of improving as a player:

> You always feel better, fitter and stronger when you play hard. We need to improve our physicality together because we want to win tournaments. And I tell you… in tournaments the opponents whack you even harder. This is the reality of street soccer (Dyn, 24, Malay, Firefighter).

[13] A local term that refers to acts of physical battery including kicking, punching, pushing and charging.
[14] A local term that expresses satisfaction.

Because ‘symbolic fighting’ in football is not a crime (cf Vermeulen 2011), the Malays are able to do so with “the abdication of conscience” (Caillois 1961: 44). In addition, the negative experiences – altercations and actual fights that occur between the Chinese and Malay users – in everyday use of the court reinforce the reputation of the Chinese, whom are deemed to be arrogant and condescending when playing football despite possessing inferior ability. Through their play, Malay users thus experiment with physical and moral deviance so as to fulfill their fantasies of mastery over their Chinese counterparts and in so doing, realize their identity as serious footballers. The territory of the street football court is the spatial expression of this mastery – to claim to an autonomous space in which their identities can be performed (Trouille 2013). This moral and physical mastery allows the Malay users to arouse, expose and satiate their personal and communal desires, culminating in a sense of excitement and satisfaction that can be defined as enchantment.

Second, if mastery over the bulk of Chinese teams consolidates an enchanting moral and physical experience for the principal users, such challenges allow them to step outside their routinized lives and develop new capacities for development of their social, physiological and mental faculties through competitive play (Stevens 2007). This reveals and realizes the potentialities of erstwhile unimagined connections between two social groups, a new and enchanting journey of experimenting with friendly competitive play. I mentioned earlier that inasmuch as the boundaries in the street football court are discursively created to be coterminous with ethnicity, this is more of a strategic manoeuvre rather than a move motivated by genuine hatred for the ‘other’. In my observations, I note that several Chinese teams who come to the court sporadically are met with a positive reception by the principal inhabitants:

> Occasionally, some of the Chinese teams step into the court and instantly you know the atmosphere is different. No booing, no jeering, almost a

> silent appreciation of their craft. Today, a Chinese team is on a four-game winning streak. Their games against the Malay teams are physically intense, but not in an overtly violent manner. Finally, they are knocked out by one of the challenging Malay teams. Both teams shake the hands of their opponents in recognition of the enjoyable sequence of events.

The above observation shows that the malleability of the discursive boundaries constructed by the Malays. The animosity displayed against certain teams is not predicated on their ethnicity but the ways in which they apply themselves to street football. In fact, Malay users look forward to the occasional challenge from Chinese teams whom they deem to be "professional, respectful, and just play their game":

> We are not really friends. But we respect them and they respect us. They can take it [referring to the hard violent game] and they are not dirty. And they are very good too. It is good training [for us]. They understand what street soccer is and they can teach us a lot (N, 27, Malay, Events Associate).

The Malays users are able and willing to manipulate their boundaries for breaks in their routine which are deemed beneficial to their football and community of friends.

Such serendipitous breaks do not only benefit the principal inhabitants of the court. I observed that some Chinese teams which come to play for the first time eventually return and in extremely rare cases, become principals themselves. Although they play elsewhere on a regular basis, these Chinese teams make it a point to frequent the street football court as a test of their team's overall ability against Malay teams who are "supposedly better". Many of these teams understand thoroughly the institutionalized 'rules' in these courts and take pride in winning despite the rules. They are also cognizant of the fact that starting altercations would not only put them at risk physically but jeopardize their chances of returning to the

court in future if they were to strain their relationship with the Malay users. Such encounters between the Malay principals and Chinese challengers create special moments of enchantment in the routinized boundaries of the court and become a stepping stone for both sets of players to demonstrate, realize and expand their capacities for excellence in the street football court. The friendship shared between Malay principals and the Chinese challengers is characterized by a mix of respect and rivalry. There is a deliberate suppression of any affection between the two ethnic groups; yet each treats the other with respect and circumspection so as to maximize the instrumentality they can extract out of each other to the end of maximizing the playful experience.

Third, extending the point on the manipulation of boundaries, it is worth noting that principal Malay teams can purposefully create their own enchanting moments, going against the very moral boundaries they create. Play between two principal teams can take on absurd, non-instrumental forms, presumably because they have the most authority in the court. Often, the game is deliberately prolonged and played as a showcase of each team's trickery and technical ability. Mistakes made by players are playfully teased and no one is actually playing to win. As one informant puts it:

> We take these chances to relax and enjoy a funny game of football. To show off our skills and show who is boss (Abdillah, 22, Malay, semi-professional footballer).

Given the tightly policed boundaries of the street football court, instances of absurd play arises as fleeting encounters of serendipity that unfetter the social order placed upon the Malay users of the court. Such practices of play allow its users to indulge in "moments of pure presence" (Fisher 1998: 131). Such play, while acting as a pleasurable end in itself, also

reinforces the dominant status of the principals in the courts, in that they are able to manipulate the boundaries whenever they like to their own ends.

5.6 Enchantment and the ludic city

In chapter two, I show how the ludic city represents the aspiration of urban scholars to understand how enchanting encounters can be created by and for urban inhabitants through playful action. Chapter four has shown that it is important to consider how certain forms of urban space (the open field or the street football court) lend itself to the interactions that take place within. As well, it emphasizes the utility of thinking the ludic city through the geographies of encounter – in this thesis, friendship, and how these manipulate the boundaries which shape the interactions between different individuals and groups and their enchanting experiences. This chapter evidently corroborates these agendas but it seeks additionally to extend engagement with the ludic city by raising some other points.

This chapter has detailed a series of encounters that seem to run counter to the 'ideals' of the ludic city described in chapter four: extraordinary encounters marked by ephemerality and spontaneity, the dissolution of boundaries and social structures and an ethics of care and inclusiveness. Yet, I argue here that the empirical findings in this chapter extend rather than contradict what we know as the ludic city. First, enchanting encounters and experiences can be a product of creating and maintaining boundaries. In chapter four and more generally in studies of the ludic city enchanting encounters are seen to be a function of the dissolution of boundaries. Yet, to the principal inhabitants of the court, it is the power to manipulate these boundaries to orchestrate their terms of play that accords them the feeling of enchantment. It is precisely the act of upholding these boundaries – and therefore the group's physical and moral beliefs – that feelings of satisfaction and plentitude are derived.

Second, and related to this, the idea of ephemerality, spontaneity and serendipity in creating enchanting encounters can be subsumed within the repeated, routinized and planned everyday boundaries in the street football court. The moments of absurd play between principal Malay teams as well as the sporadic encounters between Malay teams and 'good' Chinese teams only occur insofar as those who control to boundaries allow it to be so.

Third, the ethics of care and inclusion witnessed in chapter four are juxtaposed here against an ethics that ranges from one, the principal inhabitants' collective feelings of moral dogmatism against 'arrogant and lousy' Chinese teams to two, muted respect and rivalry between 'good Chinese teams' and three, unbridled fun and enjoyment between principal teams. This shows that enchanting encounters need not always be couched in care and inclusion; these experiences of plentitude and satisfaction can be derived in a variety of ways that should not always be regarded as inferior to care and inclusion, not least because they too are realities of social encounters in urban space.

How then does the ludic city feature in the everyday lives of urban inhabitants? In chapter four, the findings show that the ludic city is to be seen as a supplement to the already fulfilling everyday lives of certain urban inhabitants. In the street football court however, it can be argued that the ludic city features centrally to the mundane lifeworlds of other inhabitants. I establish in this chapter that football is a serious endeavour to most Malay inhabitants because one, it is essential to their self-identity that they are good footballers and two, that street football represents the start of a viable (in their opinion) path to a professional career in football. The everyday routines of play in this space are therefore inextricably linked to the everyday aspirations and lifeworlds of most Malay users of the court. Seen this way, like in chapter four, the ludic city is to be seen an important component for the reproduction of wider society – only this wider society is not measured in terms of economic development but social reproduction of a certain group of urban inhabitants.

In this chapter however, it emerges that the ludic city features centrally to the mundane lifeworlds of other inhabitants. I establish that football is a serious endeavour to most Malay inhabitants because one, it is essential to their self-identity that they are good footballers and two, that street football represents the start of a viable (in their opinion) path to a professional career in football. The everyday routines of play in this space are therefore inextricably linked to the everyday aspirations and lifeworlds of most Malay users of the court. Seen this way, like in chapter four, the ludic city is to be seen an important component for the reproduction of wider society – only this wider society is not measured in terms of economic development but social reproduction of a certain group of urban inhabitants.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Overview

This thesis has sought to extend epistemological, ontological and methodological engagement with the ludic city. To be sure, much work on critical urban and social geography has attempted to uncover the politics of co-existence in urban space and the ways in which these lead to enchantments (or not) – studies on markets, public squares, shopping districts, car boot sales – have been proliferating in academic circles. Insofar as studies of play date back to the 1960s, few have however sought to engage with play in urban spaces, especially in a way in which its imbrications with everyday encounters and lifeworlds are foregrounded. Play is an important activity which features in the everyday lives of many urban inhabitants. This has led to the stultification of a strand of research that has immense utility in helping to understand how urban inhabitants can create fulfilling lives for themselves, and how planning practice might be able to facilitate this. The liveability and enjoyment of urban inhabitants has been a perennial yet elusive goal for planners, activists, states and even corporate interests in cities, and is something worth exploring in more detail.

This thesis was therefore undertaken with the fundamental aim to build on the writings of Henri Lefebvre:

> The *right to the city*… stipulates the right to meeting and gathering; places and objects must answer to certain 'needs' generally misunderstood, to certain despised and moreover transfunctional 'functions': the 'need' for social life and a centre, the need and the function of play, the symbolic function of space (1996:195).

It is also an attempt to continue the sterling work by contemporary urban scholars like Borden, Franck and Stevens to expanding the scope and depth of inquiry with regards to playful encounters in urban space.

This thesis draws its significance from providing answers to three questions. First, how may we study the ludic city to arrive at nuanced and critical insights of its unfolding? Second, what does the ludic city entail and what are its enchantments? Third, what is the relationship between the ludic city and everyday living? I end by offering some thoughts on how planners might design urban spaces to maximize their ludic potential, to suit the specific needs of some members of the community (Lynch 1981; Talen and Ellis 2002).

6.2 How can we study the ludic city to make sense of its unfolding?

In this thesis, the methodological question precedes the ontological and epistemological question. This means that the ludic city is not taken as an ideal that is either conformed to or exceeded. Even in public space, for example, there are rigid scripts of behaviour created by its users, leading to potential for conflict and negotiation (Parkinson 2013). A universal conceptualization of the ludic city glosses over the inevitably variegated needs and wants of a diverse population. The variegated identities of urban inhabitants mean varying conceptions of use value of urban space. This leads to contradictions between different needs and wants and therefore conflict and negotiation over urban space. The ludic city as it is thus lies in the politics of co-existence in these spaces. It is taken foremost as a collection of various empirical phenomena which are then assembled to form what we know as the ludic city. I show that the ludic city is best analyzed through the geographies of encounter that in urban space. Play is very much an interactional activity, and through examining the politics of co-existence in the spaces in which play takes place an understanding of what the ludic city is as well as the nature of its enchantments can be arrived at.

Specifically, I argue that boundaries are created or dissolved by individuals and groups who use neighbourhood play spaces. In chapter four, there is a constructed consensus amongst users of the open field that the right to use the field is predicated on simply showing up to play. This is in part due to the fact that the field lacks a specific designation. In chapter five, conversely, boundaries are created discursively by a group of Malay users – the principal inhabitants of the street football court. Their territoriality is expressed in an ethnic cleavage, where Malay users declare their right to the court over their Chinese counterparts based on their footballing ability and their commitment to the sport. This is embellished the material boundary of the court which acts as a 'home away from home' (Lyman and Scott 1967) for these Malay inhabitants, making the space worth protecting.

I then show how friendship can be used as a conceptual apparatus to investigate how these boundaries can be effectively upheld and manipulated to the ends of the principal users of a play space. In chapter four, the frivolous, fleeting, egalitarian yet intensely intimate friendships dissolve the boundaries of access, social identity and morality and their attendant obligations. The friendship shared in this space is more an attempt to recruit playmates and experiment with physical, moral and social deviance rather than to form any affective bond. This allows users of the open field – not only through interacting with active others but enlisting the presence of passive spectators who may eventually become active users themselves – to engage in physically and morally vertiginous activity, as well as opening up endless possibilities for sociality. In chapter five, friendship is an obligation instrumental to maintaining the moral boundaries set by the principal inhabitants of the court. Those who are deemed 'arrogant' and 'undeserving' of using the court are sometimes almost literally 'kicked out' – violent play is used to limit the access of these teams to the court, where it is believed to be a place for serious football. Yet, it is the affective ties that keep these reciprocities going and culminate in a collective belief for doing so. These affective ties

develop over time, where Malay teams share the same space and experiencing the same 'negative' experiences against most Chinese teams.

6.3 What does the ludic city entail and what are its enchantments?

The ludic city is a conceptual apparatus that seeks to extend engagement with the interface of play and enchantment in the urban (Stevens, 2007). It also represents the realities of play and its enchantments created in urban space through varied geographies of encounter. Most of all, it represents the aspirations of planners to facilitate a fulfilling urban experience for its inhabitants.

At the heart of the ludic city is the concept of enchantment. This thesis has sought to critically analyze the nature of enchantment and the ways in which this is created. Despite a wealth of research in the social sciences on enchanting encounters in the city (see Watson 2006; 2009 for example), its definitions remain ambiguous and open. What is concurred upon is that enchantment is a feeling of satisfaction, plentitude, and wondrousness, akin to one being recharged (Bachelard 2001: 4). By combining play and enchantment as an analytical interface, this thesis has shown that enchantment is more than simply a social experience – it is very much felt in the body, heart and mind as well.

In chapter four, many footballers use the open field as a corporeal challenge; the space is one where they practice their repertoire of tricks without pressure, censure and injury. The abdication of social identity and its obligations allows users of the open field to do away with reason and engage in morally vertiginous activity – intimate and sometimes inappropriate contact with members of the opposite sex, for example. In chapter five, the principal users of the court create a moral boundary around the court, where only those whom they deem deserving of playing street football in their court are welcomed and treated with (muted) respect. The physically violent act of enforcing these boundaries - through kicking 'arrogant'

and ‘undeserving’ players off the court – is in itself also a physically satisfying and enriching experience for the principal users.

In both chapters, various possibilities of social enchantment are witnessed. In chapter four, variegated possibilities of new and unexpected social encounters are created on an everyday basis, not least due to the constant assembly and disassembly of people in the open field. This serendipity creates endless enchanting possibilities for all who inhabit the space. In chapter five, social encounters are largely controlled and routinized to fit the terms of a small group of principal inhabitants who use the court on an everyday basis. This routinization forms the basis of their enchantment. Yet, moments of looseness and rupture – albeit on the terms of the principal inhabitants – are witnessed. For instance, this manifests in the relationship of muted respect and reciprocities between Malay principal users of the court and the ‘good’ Chinese teams whom the former regard as a welcome challenge to their competencies. As well, the boundaries of treating street football as a serious endeavour are transgressed occasionally when play between two principal Malay teams take on absurd, non-instrumental forms. This is enchanting in itself, but more importantly, consolidates their role as the orchestrators of the boundaries of the court.

6.4 What is the relationship between the ludic city and everyday life?

This thesis has questioned the nature of enchantment in playful encounter, as well as the ways in which these enchantments are arrived at through analyzing the geographies of social encounter present in two urban play spaces. It has sought also to understand how the ludic city as it is imbricates with everyday urban living. This is an important interface to consider as it would be unrealistic to consider the ludic city on its own, as personal choices, paths and mobilities are always made in the context of everyday life. Both chapters have unraveled different stories.

In chapter four, the ludic city is seen as an embellishment to the already fulfilling lives of a particular group of urban inhabitants. These are people who recognize and understand their social and moral obligations in society, and do not actually desire a permanent escape from their everyday lives. They regard such enchanting encounters as a temporary escape – a safe haven – from the realities of life. Play in the open field is only significant when it does not directly detract from primary goals in life such as becoming richer, better at football and spending more time with family and friends. Using Lefebvre's (1996) concept of the *oeuvre*, where everyday life is about combining productive and non-productive acts allow the use of surplus energies to indulge in non-productive play. This allows urban inhabitants to move in and out of the rationality of everyday living at will, allowing them to explore more holistically their rationalities, abilities and fantasies in tandem. In short, such play refreshes the inhabitant and allows him/ her to become more fulfilled and therefore more productive in other spheres such as work and family. It can be argued then that the ludic city might not be construed as an antithesis to everyday living, but that these liminal moments of release are necessary for the stable reproduction of wider society (Bakhtin 1984).

In chapter five however, it emerges that the ludic city features centrally to the mundane lifeworlds of other inhabitants. Football is a serious endeavour to most Malay inhabitants because one, it is essential to their self-identity that they are good footballers and two, street football represents in their eyes the start of a viable path to a professional career in football. The everyday routines of play in this space are therefore inextricably linked to the everyday aspirations and lifeworlds of most Malay users of the court. Seen this way, like in chapter four, the ludic city is to be seen an important component for the reproduction of wider society – only this wider society is not measured in terms of economic development but social reproduction of a certain group of urban inhabitants.

6.5 Brief suggestions for planning practice

This thesis is not a planning or policy-inclined exercise. Even as this thesis emphasizes the salience of geographies of encounter in shaping play and its enchantments in urban space, the empirical findings show that the type and form of the space in which playful encounters occur is not entirely insignificant. To instantiate, the limited space and rigid material boundaries of the street football court lend itself to territorialization and contestation between different users. Conversely, the expanse of the open field, coupled with its underdetermined nature and its non-conduciveness for hanging out has enabled a heterogeneous community to flourish. By taking the ludic city to be one composed of the multiplicity of practices and negotiations of users in urban space, I offer brief suggestions on the incremental ways in which planners can design and manage public spaces to facilitate users' creation and negotiation of playful urban experiences. Play illustrates a set of relations between perceptions, intentions, actions and spatial affordances which encourage a reconsideration of both the aims and the linearity of the design process to the end of more useful, more open and more public outcomes (Stevens 2007).

6.5.1 Making play space more useful

Street football courts in Singapore (as well as most other cities) take on a rigidly monofunctional design. They accommodate ten players at a time, with little option for other forms of play to co-exist. This is due in part to the spatial constraints in Singapore's neighbourhoods as well as objectives of cost-effective investment by the planning authorities. Lynch and Carr (1995: 425) suggest that open space policy requires "criteria that go beyond optimizing economy of use". This means experimenting with spaces that do not necessitate fixed or permanent provisions. In this way, planners and designers may consider the

malleability of street football courts which allow users to expand upon a range of configurations in that space.

This could take the form of constructing a court with a total play area three to four times larger than its present counterparts, with movable boundaries – such as fences – that enable users to split the court into separate playable areas or combine all of these into one big space that could accommodate more players at the same time. As well, additions such as basketball rims could be added to the goalposts so that users with the intention of playing basketball could benefit from these spaces. Fixtures that support the erection of badminton and sepak takraw[15] nets could also easily be added without compromising the overall spatial integrity of the street football court. Through these incremental changes, the space of the court becomes "an incomplete space, one that is endlessly 'completed' by the people who use it" (CABE Space and CABE Education 2004: 13). While these may ostensibly run against common sense and the established good form of the current street football courts (Simmel 1950), the experimentation with new uses and the process of negotiation and compromise between potential users of the space could enhance the meaning of the space for its users. This way, courts may be made more useful.

6.5.2 Making play space more open

The interesting occurrences highlighted in chapter four suggest that fewer resources should be devoted to design interventions and management strategies which increase disamenity, controls, and rules that reduce the scope of users and their actions. Planners should consider providing sites that are under-designed – comprising few fixtures and with little regulation and surveillance. For example, the 'under-determinacy' of the open field allows users to

[15] Sepak takraw or kick volleyball, is a sport native to Southeast Asia. It differs from the similar sport of volleyball in its use of a rattan ball and only allowing players to use their feet, knee, chest and head to touch the ball. It is a popular sport in Southeast Asia.

"discover and establish their own forms of action, and to create functional [and affective] spaces which can better accommodate physical, exploratory, imaginative and social forms of play" (Stevens 2007: 202). Fundamentally, through the expanse of space and absence of regulation, such spaces provide potential users the same freedom to inhabit in search of enchanting experiences. Equally importantly, in providing opportunities for mixed occupancy and use, such spaces allow its users to assemble and disassemble at will. Those who wish to adhere to the rules tacitly founded on the authorization and accountability of the 'rule-makers' in one particular setting (Ackerman 1991) stay and add to the accountability of the game, while those who do not simply leave and create their own social settings within the same expanse of space. This allows the open field to contain many edges and zones that can be assembled and disassembled at will, leading to more variations in character and more opportunities for enjoyment.

Such spaces are easy to construct and maintain, and provide a refreshing alternative to purpose-built play spaces. The increasing provision of open fields by the state for recreation in Singapore is an encouraging sight – testament to the planning authorities' cognizance of the importance of such under-determined spaces to the play in the urban. Such spaces are however only provided in lieu of any alternative use – such as developing commercial or residential projects – perceived to be of more importance than recreational needs. The issue of balancing economic and social objectives remains an important consideration for planners.

6.5.3 Making play space more public

Play must be meaningful to both the active and passive users in a play space. This is known as the publicness of play. The findings in this thesis show how the drama of play is contingent on the dialectical relationship between active and passive users of a play space. In chapter four, individual players in the open field perform risky bodily acts to impress the

bystanders who cheer at and laugh with their every pursuit. Lured by the ongoing activity, bystanders also join in the play and pull out when they want, vacillating between active and passive user in the open field. More importantly, it is the spontaneity and unpredictability of users who join in and move between passive and active roles in play spaces that contribute to the endless possibilities of sociality in such spaces.

In chapter five, the Malay players and teams waiting their turn on the outside of the street football court form the crux of the ethnically-charged competitive atmosphere within. These 'passive' actors are obliged to display overt signs of support by heckling the Chinese challengers and standing up together to these Chinese teams in the event of an altercation. In reverse, the players in the court perform the routine of play for their audience outside. For the Malay principals, playing hard and winning games is both an overt show of their principal status and a lesson on how all Malay users should act in the court. In both instances, playful encounters and their enchantments are shaped by the dialectical relationship between the active and passive users in space.

In planning terms, this means that the location and design of the play space is important. Play spaces situated in specific neighbourhoods promote territorialization and often cater only to specific groups of people. This in itself is not a problem but more consideration should be taken to allow play spaces to become more inclusive to people from all walks of life. Situating play spaces in conspicuous public locations such as shopping streets and downtown plazas where strangers have close, unplanned bodily and social encounters in the presence of onlookers can certainly add to the ludic potential of the city, even if these spaces are temporary and intermittent due to practical constraints. The areas encompassing play spaces also need to facilitate comfortable seating or standing so that passers-by are inclined to become passive users of the space. The open field at Tanjong Rhu has been so successful

because of its unique location in the midst of private condominiums, the SportsHub[16] and the Kallang River. The area garners heavy human traffic comprising residents, visitors to the SportsHub and people running and cycling along the river. This has meant a high instance of passers-by (myself included) chancing upon and joining in the on-going activities in the field, with the possibility of returning in future.

[16] The Singapore Sports Hub is a state-owned sports complex located in Kallang, Singapore. It comprises various sporting facilities, some of which open to the public.

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